Theodoric the Great

(c. 471 – 30 August 526)

BRIEFING

Theodoric (or **Theoderic**) **the Great** (454 – 30 August 526), also called **Theodoric the Amal**, was king of the Ostrogoths (475–526), and ruler of the independent Ostrogothic Kingdom of Italy between 493 and 526, regent of the Visigoths (511–526), and a patrician of the Eastern Roman Empire. As ruler of the combined Gothic realms, Theodoric controlled an empire stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Adriatic Sea. Though Theodoric himself only used the title 'king' (*rex*), some scholars characterize him as a Western Roman emperor in all but name, since he ruled a large part of the former Western Roman Empire described as a *Res Publica*, had received the former Western imperial regalia from Constantinople in 497 which he used, was referred to by the imperial title *princeps* by the Italian aristocracy and exercised imperial powers recognized in the East, such as naming consuls.

As a young child of an Ostrogothic nobleman, Theodoric was taken as a hostage to Constantinople, where he spent his formative years and received an East Roman education (*paideia*). Theodoric returned to Pannonia around 470, and throughout the 470s he campaigned against the Sarmatians and competed for influence among the Goths of the Roman Balkans, gaining recognition as King in 471. The emperor Zeno made him commander of the Eastern Roman forces in 483 and consul in 484. Nevertheless, Theodoric remained in constant hostilities with the emperor and frequently raided East Roman territory.

At the behest of Zeno, in 489 Theodoric attacked Odoacer, the king of Italy, emerging victorious in 493. As the new ruler of Italy, he upheld a Roman legal administration and scholarly culture while promoting a major building program across Italy. In 505 he expanded into the Balkans, and by 511 he had brought the Visigothic Kingdom of Spain under his direct control and established hegemony over the Burgundian and Vandal kingdoms. Theodoric died in 526 and was buried in a grand mausoleum in Ravenna. He lived on as the figure Dietrich von Bern in Germanic heroic legend.

YOUTH AND EARLY EXPLOITS

Theodoric was born in AD 454 in Pannonia on the banks of the Neusiedler See near Carnuntum, the son of king Theodemir, a Germanic Amali nobleman, and his concubine Ereleuva. This was just a year after the Ostrogoths had thrown off nearly a century of domination by the Huns. To this end, historian Hans-Ulrich Wiemer states that, "Theodoric's childhood was spent at a time of violent conflicts between non-Roman groups attempting to fill the power vacuum created by the collapse of Attila's empire". His Gothic name, which is reconstructed by linguists as **Þiudareiks*, translates into "people-king" or "ruler of the people".

In 461, when Theodoric was seven or eight years of age, he was taken hostage in Constantinople to secure the Ostrogoths' compliance with a treaty Theodemir had concluded with the *augustus* Leo I (ruled 457–474). Under the terms of the treaty, the Pannonian Goths were required to "surrender a hostage of royal descent" to the emperor's court; in this case that hostage was Theodoric. The treaty also secured a payment to Constantinople of some 300 pounds' worth of gold each year. Theodoric was well educated by Constantinople's best teachers. His status made him valuable, since the Amal family from which he came (as told by Theodoric), allegedly ruled half of all Goths since the third century AD. Historian Peter Heather argues that Theodoric's claims were likely self-aggrandizing propaganda and that the Amal dynasty was more limited than modern commentators presume. Until 469, Theodoric remained in Constantinople where he spent formative years "catching up on all the *Romanitas*" it had taken generations of Visigothic Balthi to acquire. Theodoric was treated with favor by the emperor Leo I. He learned to read, write and perform arithmetic while in captivity in the Eastern Empire.

When Leo heard that his imperial army was retreating from the Goths near Pannonia, he sent Theodoric home with gifts and no promises of any commitments. On his return in 469/470, Theodoric assumed leadership over the Gothic regions previously ruled by his uncle, Valamir, while his father became king. Not long afterwards near Singidunum (modern Belgrade) in upper Moesia, the Tisza Sarmatian king Babai had extended his authority at Constantinople's expense. Legitimizing his position as a warrior, Theodoric crossed the Danube with six thousand warriors, defeated the Sarmatians and killed Babai; this moment likely crystallized his position and marked the beginning of his kingship, despite not actually having yet assumed the throne. Perhaps to assert his authority as an Amali prince, Theodoric kept the conquered area of Singidunum for himself.

Throughout the 470s, sometimes in the name of the empire itself, Theodoric launched campaigns against potential Gothic rivals and other enemies of the Eastern Empire, which made him an important military and political figure. One of his chief rivals was the chieftain of the Thracian Goths Theodoric Strabo (Strabo means "the Squinter"), who had led a major revolt against the emperor Zeno. Finding common ground with the emperor, Theodoric was rewarded by Zeno and made commander of East Roman forces, while his people became *foederati* or federates of the Roman army. In 471, Theodoric was recognized as King of the Ostrogoths by 6,000 Goths that had previously rebelled against the Hunnic ruler Dengizich in 467–468.

Zeno attempted to play one Germanic chieftain against another and take advantage of an opportunity sometime in 476/477 when—after hearing demands from Theodoric for new lands since his people were facing a famine—he offered Theodoric Strabo the command once belonging to Theodoric. Enraged by this betrayal, Theodoric turned his wrath against the communities in the Rhodope Mountains, where his forces commandeered livestock and slaughtered peasants, sacked and burned Stobi in Macedonia and requisitioned supplies from the archbishop at Heraclea. Gothic plundering finally elicited a settlement from Zeno, but Theodoric initially refused any compromise. Theodoric sent one of his confidants, Sidimund, forward to Epidaurum for negotiations with Zeno. While the Roman envoy and Theodoric were negotiating, Zeno sent troops against some of Theodoric's wagons, which were under the protection of his able general Theodimund. Unaware of this treachery, Theodoric's Goths lost around 2,000 wagons and 5,000 of his people were taken captive.

Theodoric settled his people in Epirus in 479 with the help of his relative Sidimund. In 482, he raided Greece and sacked Larissa. Bad luck, rebellions and poor decisions left Zeno in an unfortunate position, which subsequently led him to seek another agreement with Theodoric. In 483, Zeno made Theodoric *magister militum praesentalis* and consul designate in 484, whereby he commanded the Danubian provinces of Dacia Ripensis and Moesia Inferior as well as the adjacent regions.

REIGN

Seeking further gains, Theodoric frequently ravaged the provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire, eventually threatening Constantinople itself. By 486, there was little disputing the open hostilities between Theodoric and Zeno. The emperor sought the assistance of the Bulgars, who were likewise defeated by Theodoric. In 487, Theodoric began his aggressive campaign against Constantinople, blockading the city, occupying strategically important suburbs, and cutting off its water supply; although it seems Theodoric never intended to occupy the city but instead, to use the assault as a means of gaining power and prestige from the Eastern Empire.

The Ostrogoths needed a place to live and Zeno was having serious problems with Odoacer—the Germanic foederatus and King of Italy—who although ostensibly viceroy for Zeno, was menacing Byzantine territory and not respecting the rights of Roman citizens in Italy. In 488, Zeno ordered Theodoric to overthrow Odoacer. For this task, he received support from Rugian king Frideric, the son of Theodoric's cousin Giso. Theodoric moved with his people towards Italy in the autumn of 488. On the way he was opposed by the Gepids, whom he defeated at Sirmium in August 489. Arriving in Italy, Theodoric won the battles of Isonzo and Verona in 489.

Once again, Theodoric was pressed by Zeno in 490 to attack Odoacer. Theodoric's army was defeated by Odoacer's forces at Faenza in 490, but regained the upper hand after securing victory in the Battle of the Adda River on 11 August 490. For several years, the armies of Odoacer and Theodoric vied for supremacy across the Italian peninsula. Theodoric besieged Odoacer in Ravenna until 2 February 493, when a treaty was signed making the kings joint rulers of Italy. Theodoric entered Ravenna on 5 March 493, and a banquet celebrating the treaty was organized on 15 March. At this feast, Theodoric, after making a toast, drew his sword and struck Odoacer, splitting him in two from collarbone to thigh. Theodoric had the king's most loyal followers slaughtered as well, making him the master of Italy.

With Odoacer dead and his forces dispersed, Theodoric now faced the problem of settlement for his people. Concerned about thinning out the Amal line too much, Theodoric believed he could not afford to spread some 40,000 of his tribesmen across the entire Italian peninsula. Such considerations led him to the conclusion that it was best to settle the Ostrogoths in three concentrated areas: around Pavia, Ravenna and Picenum. Theodoric's kingdom was among the most "Roman" of the barbarian states and he successfully ruled most of Italy for thirty-three years following his treachery against Odoacer. He visited Rome in 500 where he stayed for 6 months and held games in the Circus, probably also in the Colosseum, and renewed the grain largesse to the Roman populace, which had perhaps been interrupted since the days of Odoacer. Theodoric's settlement policy involved granting Gothic warriors land in Italy through a modified version of the Roman hospitalitas system. According to Wiemer, this provided a means of rewarding Gothic loyalty while avoiding wholesale confiscation of Roman estates. However, it also entrenched social divisions and created enduring tensions.

Theodoric extended his hegemony over the Burgundian and Vandal kingdoms (along with Visigothic royals) through marriage alliances. He had married the sister of the mighty Frankish king, Clovis—likely in recognition of Frankish power. He sent a substantial dowry accompanied by a guard of 5,000 troops with his sister Amalafrida when she married the king of the Vandals and Alans, Thrasamund. These policies aimed to position Theodoric as the senior monarch among the western barbarian kings. In 504–505, Theodoric extended his realms in the Balkans by defeating the Gepids, acquiring the province of Pannonia. Theodoric became regent for the infant Visigothic king, his grandson Amalaric, following the defeat of Alaric II by the Franks under Clovis in 507. The Franks were able to wrest control of Aquitaine from the Visigoths, but otherwise Theodoric was able to defeat their incursions.

In 511, the Visigothic Kingdom was brought under Theodoric's direct control, forming a Gothic superstate that extended from the Atlantic to the Danube. While territories that were lost to the Franks remained that way, Theodoric concluded a peace arrangement with the heirs of the Frankish Kingdom once Clovis was dead. Additional evidence of the Gothic king's extensive royal reach include the acts of ecclesiastical councils that were held in Tarragona and Gerona; while both occurred in 516 and 517, they date back to the "regnal years of Theoderic, which seem to commence in the year 511".

Like Odoacer, Theodoric was ostensibly only a viceroy for the augustus in Constantinople, but he nonetheless adopted the trappings of imperial style, increasingly emphasizing his "neo-imperial status". According to historian Peter Brown, Theodoric was in the habit of commenting that "An able Goth wants to be like a Roman; only a poor Roman would want to be like a Goth."

Much like the representatives of the Eastern Empire, Theodoric chose to be clad in robes dyed purple, emulating the imperial colors and perhaps even to reinforce the imperial dispatch of the augustus Anastasius I, which outlined Theodoric's position as an imperial colleague. Chroniclers like Cassiodorus added a layer of legitimacy for Theodoric and the Amal tribe from which he came by casting them as cooperative participants in the greater history of the Mediterranean dating back to the era of Alexander the Great. Though he did not adopt the title Imperator, Theodoric employed many of the ceremonial and symbolic forms associated with Roman emperors, including triumphal entries (adventus), and formal addresses to the people (adlocutio) of Rome.

Wiemer argues that this ceremonial adoption of imperial norms served to legitimize Theodoric's rule in the eyes of Roman elites. In reality—at least in part due to his formidable military—he was able to avoid imperial supervision, and dealings between the emperor and Theodoric were as equals. Unlike Odoacer, however, Theodoric respected the agreement he had made and allowed Roman citizens within his kingdom to be subject to Roman law and the Roman judicial system. The Goths, meanwhile, lived under their own laws and customs.

Theodoric preserved legal distinctions between Goths and Romans by maintaining separate legal traditions. Roman subjects continued to be governed by Roman law, while Gothic military settlers operated under Gothic customary law. This legal bifurcation, according to Wiemer, was central to Theodoric's vision of coexistence and order in his kingdom. Historian Hans-Ulrich Wiemer characterizes Theodoric's rule as based on a principle of "integration through separation," whereby the Ostrogoths and the Roman population maintained distinct legal and cultural spheres.

While Goths served primarily in military roles under their own legal codes, the Roman population continued to be governed by Roman law and staffed the civil administration. This dual structure allowed Theodoric to preserve ethnic identities while ensuring administrative stability in Italy. In 519, when a mob had burned down the synagogues of Ravenna, Theodoric ordered the town to rebuild them at its own expense.

Theodoric experienced difficulties before his death. He had married off his daughter Amalasuintha to the Visigoth Eutharic, but Eutharic died in August 522 or 523, so no lasting dynastic connection of Ostrogoths and Visigoths was established, which highlighted the tensions between the Eastern Empire and the West. The new augustus, Justin I—who replaced Anastasius, a man with whom Theodoric had good relations—was under the influence of his nephew Justinian; somehow, imperial views hardened against the West and talk of Rome's fall emerged during this period, leading to questions about the legitimacy of barbarian rule.

Theodoric's good relations with the Roman Senate deteriorated due to a presumed senatorial conspiracy in 522, and, in 523, Theodoric had the philosopher and court official Boethius and Boethius' father-in-law Symmachus arrested on charges of treason related to the alleged plot. For his ostensible role, Theodoric had Boethius executed in 524. Although Theodoric initially promoted religious toleration between Arian Goths and Catholic Romans, tensions escalated in the final years of his reign. The arrest and execution of the Roman senator Boethius on charges of treason marked a turning point. In some ways, this event reflects Theodoric's increasing political paranoia and declining trust in the Roman aristocracy

Despite the complex relationship between Theodoric and his son-in-law, the Catholic Burgundian king Sigismund, the two enjoyed a mutual peace for fifteen years. Then in 522, Sigismund killed his own son—Theodoric's grandson—Sigeric; an act which infuriated Theodoric and he retaliated by invading the Burgundian kingdom, accompanied by the Franks. Between the two peoples, Sigismund's Burgundian forces faced two fronts and were defeated. Meanwhile, Sigismund's Arian brother Godomar established himself as king over the remaining Burgundian territory and ruled for a decade.

When Theodoric's sister Amalafrida sought to possibly change the direction of Vandal succession following the death of her spouse, the former Vandal king Thrasamund, the new Catholic Vandal king Hilderic had her, along with the accompanying Gothic retinue, killed. Theodoric was incensed and planned an expedition to restore his power over the Vandal kingdom when he died of dysentery in the summer of 526.

The Gothic king was succeeded by his grandson Athalaric, with Theodoric's daughter Amalasuintha serving as regent since Athalaric was but ten years of age when Theodoric died. Her role was to carry out the dead ruler's political testament, to seek accommodation with the senate, and maintain peace with the emperor. Suddenly the once united Goths were split and Theodoric's grandson Amalaric ruled the newly independent Visigothic kingdom for the next five years.

FAMILY AND PROGENY

Theodoric was married once. He had a concubine in Moesia, name unknown, with whom he had two daughters:

- Ostrogotho (ca. 475 – 520). She was married to the king Sigismund of Burgundy as a part of her father's alliance with the Burgundians.
- Theodegotha (ca. 473 – ?). In 494, she was married to Alaric II as a part of her father's alliance with the Visigoths.

By his marriage in 493 to the pagan Audofleda—the sister of Clovis, who was baptized an Arian at the time of their wedding—Theodoric had one daughter:

- Amalasuintha, Queen of the Goths. She was married to Eutharic and had two children: Athalaric and Matasuntha (the latter being married to Witiges first, then, after Witiges' death, married to Germanus Justinus).

After his death in Ravenna in 526, Theodoric was succeeded by his grandson Athalaric. Athalaric was at first represented by his mother Amalasuintha, who served as regent between 534 and 535. The kingdom of the Ostrogoths, however, began to wane and the personal union of the Gothic tribes, once brought together by Theodoric, collapsed following his demise. The subsequent campaigns into Italy by Justinian—whose long reign from 527 to 565 delineates the transition from "antiquity to the Middle Ages in the Latin West" according to historian Michael Kulikowski—wrought the final blows to Theodoric's once dominant kingdom.

BUILDING PROGRAMS

Theodoric promoted the rebuilding of Roman cities and the preservation of ancient monuments in Italy. In 500, Rome itself was given special attention by Theodoric, who wanted to restore the structures previously damaged by time and the barbarians alike, since as he mused, Rome's great buildings were witness to its grandeur, power, and thereto instructed his architects to restore all that was "ancient". His preservation efforts were designed to elicit awe and admiration in future generations. The fame of Theodoric's building works reached far-away Syria. In the aggregate, Theodoric's building program saw more extensive new construction and restoration than that of any of the West Roman emperors after Honorius (395–423).

Ravenna

Theodoric devoted most of his architectural attention to his capital, Ravenna. He restored Ravenna's water supply by repairing an aqueduct originally built by Trajan. According to the chronicles of Cassiodorus, a number of cities were renewed by Theodoric's building enterprises, some of which even surpassed the ancient wonders. Historian Jonathan J. Arnold quips:

Northern cities like Ravenna, Verona, Pavia, Milan, Parma, Como, Aquileia, and still others received new or improved walls, palaces, aqueducts, churches, baths, and a host of other impressive and glorious buildings, all reiterating to their respective inhabitants their own importance within a newly revived and reinvigorated Roman Empire and connecting such ideas with the intervention of a caring and devoted *princeps*, Theodoric.

He constructed a "Great Basilica of Hercules" next to a colossal statue of the hero himself. To promote Arianism, the king commissioned a small Arian cathedral, the *Hagia Anastasis*, which contains the Arian Baptistery. Three more churches built by Theodoric in Ravenna and its suburbs, S. Andrea dei Goti, S. Giorgio and S. Eusebio, were destroyed in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. Theodoric built the Palace of Theodoric for himself in Ravenna, modeled on the Great Palace of Constantinople. It was an expansion of an earlier Roman structure. The palace church of Christ the Redeemer survives and is known today as the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. It was Theodoric's personal church of worship and was modeled specifically according to his tastes. An equestrian statue of Theodoric was erected in the square in front of the palace. Statues like these were symbols of the ancient world, and Theodoric's equestrian likeness was meant to convey his status as the undisputed ruler of the western empire.

Theodoric the Great was interred in Ravenna, but his bones were scattered and his mausoleum was converted to a church after Belisarius conquered the city in 540. His mausoleum is one of the finest monuments in Ravenna. Unlike all the other contemporary buildings in Ravenna, which were made of brick, the Mausoleum of Theodoric was built completely from fine quality stone ashlars. Possibly as a reference to the Goths' tradition of an origin in Scandinavia, the architect decorated the frieze with a pattern found in 5th- and 6th-century Scandinavian metal adornments.

Rome

The Palace of Domitian on the Palatine Hill was reconstructed, using the receipts from a specially levied tax; while the city walls of Rome were rebuilt, a feat celebrated by the Senate of Rome with a gilded statue of Theodoric. The Senate's Curia, the Theatre of Pompey, the city aqueducts, sewers and a granary were refurbished and repaired and statues were set up in the Flavian Amphitheatre.

RELIGION

In 522 the philosopher Boethius became his *magister officiorum* (head of all the government and court services). Boethius was a Roman aristocrat and Christian humanist, who was also a philosopher, poet, theologian, mathematician, astronomer, translator and commentator on Aristotle and other Greek luminaries. It is hard to overestimate this one-time servant and eventual victim of Theodoric for his influence on philosophy, particularly Christian philosophy, throughout the Middle Ages. Boethius' treatises and commentaries became textbooks for medieval students, and the great Greek philosophers were unknown except for his Latin translations. The execution of Boethius did nothing to dissipate tensions between Arians and Catholics but merely raised additional questions about barbarian imperial legitimacy.

Theodoric was of the Arian (nontrinitarian) faith, and in his final years he was no longer the disengaged Arian patron of religious toleration that he had seemed earlier in his reign. "Indeed, his death cut short what could well have developed into a major persecution of Catholic churches in retaliation for measures taken by Justinian in Constantinople against Arians there." Despite the Byzantine *caesaropapism*, which conflated imperial and ecclesiastical authority in the same person—whereby Theodoric's Arian beliefs were tolerated under two separate emperors—the fact remained that to most clergy across the Eastern Empire, Theodoric was a heretic. At the end of his reign quarrels arose with his Roman subjects and the Byzantine emperor Justin I over the matter of Arianism. These quarrels ultimately led to the martyrdom of Boethius and Pope John I by starvation in 524 and 526, respectively. Relations between the two realms deteriorated, although Theodoric's military abilities dissuaded the Byzantines from waging war against him. After his death, that reluctance faded quickly.

LEGACY

Seeking to restore the glory of ancient Rome, Theodoric ruled Italy during one of its most peaceful and prosperous periods and was accordingly hailed as a new Trajan and Valentinian I for his building efforts and his religious toleration. His far-sighted goals included taking what was best from Roman culture and combining it with Gothic energy and physical power as a way into the future. Relatively amicable relations between Goths and Romans also make Theodoric's kingdom notable. Memories of his reign made him a hero of medieval German legends, as Dietrich von Bern, where the two figures have represented the same person.

Historian John Julius Norwich wrote:

> No other Germanic ruler, setting up his throne on the ruins of the Western Empire, possessed a fraction of his statesmanship and political vision; and when he died ... Italy lost the greatest of her early medieval rulers, unequalled until the days of Charlemagne.

Modern historiographical debate

There is an ongoing debate among modern historians as to how qualify the nature of power Theodoric wielded in his domains. Traditionalists have argued for some time that Theodoric was a Germanic king, citing as their frame of reference later Byzantine sources—written during the Gothic war—that brand him as a barbarian king, who merely mimicked Roman customs. One scholar, Jonathan J. Arnold, advocates that this nature changed during the course of the 6th century; Arnold alludes to local and contemporary sources such as Magnus Felix Ennodius's *Vita beatissimi viri Epiphani episcopi Ticinensis ecclesiae*, Cassiodorus's *Variae* and *Laudes* or the *Pars Posterior* of the Anonymus Valesianus, arguing therefrom that Rome in the West did not fall in 476, but merely awaited a "proper Roman emperor to rule it". According to Arnold, these two sources ultimately reveal that Theodoric was actually viewed both by the Italian nobility and the Eastern court in Constantinople as a legitimate Western Roman emperor.

Arnold built his case on the fact that Theodoric widely used the title of *princeps* for himself, and employed the term *Res Publica* to describe the domain he ruled. These titles, although archaic, were customarily reserved for the emperor and his empire. Thereto Arnold explains that the restraint shown by Theodoric in refraining to use titles such as *Imperator*, *Imperium* or *Augustus* was aimed at sparing the pride of the Eastern monarchy and ensuring Byzantium of its seniority, but that this did not diminish Theodoric's claim to the purple in the West.

This view is however rejected by other scholars, such as Theodoric's most recent biographer, Hans-Ulrich Wiemer. He claims that Jonathan J. Arnold takes at face value, comments of a few interested parties among the Italian nobility. Wiemer contends that these few sources, close to Theodoric and of a doubtful impartiality, should not be used to infer the general opinion toward Theodoric from all classes of the Italian population or among the residents of Constantinople. He further states that this vision of Theodoric's position fails to address the duality of his rule; namely, having to retain the loyalty of both Romans and Goths alike. Wiemer posits that, "The “Roman” interpretation of Theodoric has recently been taken to extremes in the theory that Theodoric was virtually a Western Roman emperor in Italy. According to this view, Theodoric restored the Roman Empire in the West, which he ruled as *princeps Romanus*. » Demonstrating his doubts on this, Wiemer points out how during Theodoric's rule, he kept the two ethnic groups—Italo-Romans and Goths—clearly separated. For instance, only Goths could carry certain military equipment (swords, lances, shields, and helmets) or assume key positions in the military hierarchy, and the hairstyles between Goths and Romans remained distinctive, let alone their language. Wiemer also avows that the Eastern court never formally acknowledged Theodoric as a Western Emperor, a necessary condition to become one, the last of which ever recognized by Constantinople being Julius Nepos, who died in 480. Additionally, Wiemer highlights the fact that for political reasons, the Frankish and Burgundian kings never recognized Theodoric as an emperor—each established as rulers in their own right—and as the Ostrogothic king's Germanic kinsman, they were tied to one another via diplomatic marriages.

Medieval reception and misuse

Theodoric is an important figure in Germanic heroic legend as the character *Dietrich von Bern* (Old High German: *Deotrīh*), known in Old Norse as *Þjóðrekr* or *Þiðrekr*, and Old English as *Þēodrīc*. In German legends, Dietrich becomes an exile from his native kingdom of Lombardy, fighting with the help of Etzel against his usurping uncle, Ermenrich. Only the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* still contains Odoacer (Old High German: *Otacher*) as Dietrich's antagonist. The 13th century Norse Þiðreks saga, based on lost Low German sources, moves the location of Dietrich's life to Westphalia and northern Germany. The legends paint a generally positive picture of Dietrich, with only some influence visible from the negative traditions of the church.

Beyond the appropriation of Theodoric's legacy for medieval legends, his namesake and exploits were also seized upon in various nationalist contexts, particularly in 19th- and 20th-century Germany. For their politico-ideological purposes, historians and ideologues recast Theodoric as a prototypical Germanic hero, emphasizing his supposed racial and cultural purity. During the Nazi era, he was celebrated as a model of Germanic leadership and correspondingly used in state propaganda

DIETRICH VON BERN

Dietrich von Bern is the name of a character in Germanic heroic legend who originated as a legendary version of the Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great. The name "Dietrich", meaning "Ruler of the People", is a form of the Germanic name "Theodoric". In the legends, Dietrich is a king ruling from Verona (Bern) who was forced into exile with the Huns under Etzel by his evil uncle Ermenrich. The differences between the known life of Theodoric and the picture of Dietrich in the surviving legends are usually attributed to a long-standing oral tradition that continued into the sixteenth century. Most notably, Theodoric was an invader rather than the rightful king of Italy and was born shortly after the death of Attila and a hundred years after the death of the historical Gothic king Ermanaric. Differences between Dietrich and Theodoric were already noted in the Early Middle Ages and led to a long-standing criticism of the oral tradition as false.

Legends about Theodoric may have existed already shortly after his death in 526. The oldest surviving literature of various Germanic-speaking peoples mentioning the hero Dietrich von Bern, includes the Old English poems *Widsith*, *Deor*, and *Waldere*, the Old High German poem *Hildebrandslied*, and possibly the Rök runestone. The bulk of the legendary material about Dietrich/Theodoric comes from high and late medieval Holy Roman Empire and is composed in Middle High German or Early New High German. Another important source for legends about Dietrich is the Old Norse *Thidrekssaga*, which was written using German sources. In addition to the legends detailing events that may reflect the historical Theodoric's life in some fashion, many of the legends tell of Dietrich's battles against dwarfs, dragons, giants, and other mythical beings, as well as other heroes such as Siegfried. Additionally, Dietrich develops mythological attributes such as an ability to breathe fire. Dietrich also appears as a supporting character in other heroic poems such as the *Nibelungenlied*, and medieval German literature frequently refers and alludes to him.

Poems about Dietrich were extremely popular among the medieval German nobility and, later, the late medieval and early modern patrician classes, but were frequently targets of criticism by persons writing on behalf of the church. Though some continued to be printed in the seventeenth century, most of the legends were slowly forgotten after 1600. They became objects of academic study by the end of the sixteenth century, and were revived somewhat in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, resulting in some stories about Dietrich being popular in South Tyrol, the setting for many of the legends. In particular, the legend of Laurin has continued to be important there, with the Rosengarten group of mountains associated with the legend.

Development in the oral tradition

Dietrich von Bern and Theoderic the Great were usually treated as the same figure throughout the Middle Ages. However, the lives of Dietrich von Bern and Theodoric the Great have several important differences. Whereas Theodoric the Great conquered Italy as an invader, Dietrich von Bern is portrayed as exiled from his rightful kingdom in Italy. Also, Dietrich is portrayed as a contemporary of Etzel (Attila the Hun, died 453) and his uncle is the semi-legendary Gothic king Ermenrich (Ermanaric, died 370s). Dietrich is associated with Verona (the *Bern* of his name) rather than the capital of the historical Theodoric, Ravenna; the connection to Verona is attested since at least the eleventh century in Latin chronicles, beginning with the Annals of Quedlinburg.

Dietrich has a number of mythological features: In the early eleventh-century *Waldere* he is an enemy of giants, and in later Middle High German texts he also fights against dwarfs and wild men.[6] Even more notable is the fact that multiple texts record Dietrich breathing fire.

The change of Dietrich from invader to exiled ruler trying to reclaim his land is usually explained as following well-known motifs of oral tradition. In effect, Theodoric's conquest has been transformed according to a literary scheme consisting of exile, then return, a story which has a relatively consistent set of recurring motifs throughout world literature. The story told in the heroic tradition is nevertheless meant to convey a particular understanding of the historical event, namely: that Dietrich/Theodoric was in the right when he conquered Italy.[9] Dietrich's exile and repeated failed attempts to reconquer his rightful kingdom, as reported in the later historical poems, may also be a reflection of the destruction of Theodoric's Gothic kingdom by the Byzantine Empire under Justinian I. This is particularly true for the figure of Witege and his betrayal at Ravenna, as told in *Die Rabenschlacht*. Millet notes, furthermore, that Dietrich is portrayed as without any heirs and that his closest relatives and supporters die in every attempt to reclaim Italy; this too could be a way to explain the short duration of Ostrogothic rule in Italy.

Dietrich's coexistence with Attila and Ermanaric is usually explained by another process active in oral storytelling, synchronization. Dietrich is already associated with an exile among the Huns in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* (before 900), and possibly with Etzel/Attila, depending on how one interprets the mentioned *huneo druhtin* (Hunnish lord). The *Hildebrandslied* nevertheless still retains Theodoric's historical opponent Odoacer, seemingly showing that Odoacer was the original opponent. It is also possible that the author of the *Hildebrandslied* altered the report in the oral saga by replacing the unhistorical Emenrich with the historical Odoacer. It is possible that Ermenrich/Ermanaric was drawn into the story due to his historical enmity with the Huns, who destroyed his kingdom. He was also famous for killing his relatives, and so his attempts to kill his kinsman Dietrich make sense in the logic of the oral tradition.

It is possible that Dietrich's association with Verona suggests Longobardic influence on the oral tradition, as Verona was the Longobardic capital for a time, while Ravenna was under the control of the Byzantines.[11] The figure of Dietrich's tutor and mentor Hildebrand is also often thought to derive from Longobardic influence.[14] Heinzle suggests that the exile-saga may have been first told among the Longobards, giving the end of the sixth century as the latest date at which the story may have formed, with the Longobardic conquest of Italy.

Appearance in early Germanic literature

One of the earliest (quasi-)literary sources about the legend of Theodoric is the Rök Stone, carved in Sweden in the 9th century. There he is mentioned in a stanza in the Eddic *fornyrðislag* meter:

Theodoric the bold - Reð Þioðrikʀ
king of sea-warriors - hinn þurmoði,
ruled over - stilliʀ flutna,
Reid-sea shores - strandu Hraiðmaraʀ.
Now he sits armed - Sitiʀ nu garuʀ
on his Gothic horse - a guta sinum,
shield strapped, - skialdi umb fatlaðʀ,
prince of the Maerings - skati Mæringa.

The mention of Theodoric (among other heroes and gods of Norse mythology) may have been inspired by a no longer extant statue of an unknown emperor assumed to be Theodoric sitting on his horse in Ravenna, which was moved in 801 A.D. to Aachen by Charlemagne. This statue was very famous and portrayed Theodoric with his shield hanging across his left shoulder, and his lance extended in his right hand: the German clerical poet Walahfrid wrote a poem (De imagine Tetrici) lampooning the statue, as Theodoric was not favorably regarded by the church. Alternatively, Otto Höfler has proposed that Theodoric on the horse may be connected in some way to traditions of Theodoric as the Wild Huntsman (see the Wunderer below); Joachim Heinzle rejects this interpretation.

Dietrich's earliest mention in Germany is the Hildebrandslied, recorded around 820. In this, Hadubrand recounts the story of his father Hildebrand's flight eastwards in the company of Dietrich, to escape the enmity of Odoacer (this character would later become his uncle Ermanaric). Hildebrand reveals that he has lived in exile for 30 years. Hildebrand has an arm ring given to him by the (unnamed) King of the Huns, and is taken to be an "old Hun" by Hadubrand. The obliqueness of the references to the Dietrich legend, which is just the background to Hildebrand's story, indicates an audience thoroughly familiar with the material. In this work Dietrich's enemy is the historically correct Odoacer (though in fact Theodoric the Great was never exiled by Odoacer), indicating that the figure of Ermanaric belongs to a later development of the legend.

Dietrich furthermore is mentioned in the Old English poems *Waldere*, *Deor* and *Widsith*. *Deor* marks the first mention to Dietrich's "thirty years" (probably his exile) and refers to him, like the Rök stone, as a Mæring. The *Waldere* makes mention of Dietrich's liberation from the captivity of giants by Witige (Widia), for which Dietrich rewarded Witige with a sword. This liberation forms the plot of the later fantastical poem *Virginal* and is mentioned in the historical poem *Alpharts Tod*. *Widsith* mentions him among a number of other Gothic heroes, including Witige, Heime, the Harlungen and Ermanaric, and in connection with a battle with Attila's Huns. However, the exact relationship between the figures is not explained

Middle High German Dietrich poems

Dietrich von Bern first appears in Middle High German heroic poetry in the Nibelungenlied. There he appears in the exile situation at Etzel's court that forms the basis for the historical Dietrich poems (see below). Dietrich also appears in the *Nibelungenklage*, a work closely related to the *Nibelungenlied* that describes the aftermath of that poem. In the *Klage*, Dietrich returns from exile to his kingdom of Italy; the poem also alludes to the events described in the later Rabenschlacht.[28] Poems with Dietrich as the main character begin to enter writing afterwards, with the earliest attested being the fantastical poem the Eckenlied (c. 1230). The oral tradition continued alongside this written tradition, with influences from the oral tradition visible in the written texts, and with the oral tradition itself most likely altered in response to the written poems.

The Middle High German Dietrich poems are usually divided into two categories: historical poems and fantastical poems. The former concern the story of Dietrich's fights against Ermenrich and exile at Etzel's court, whereas in the latter he battles against various mythological creatures. This latter group is often called "aventiurehaft" in German, referring to its similarity to courtly romance. Despite connections made between different Dietrich poems and to other heroic cycles such as the Nibelungenlied, Wolfdietrich, and Ortnit, the Dietrich poems never form a closed poetic cycle, with the relationships between the different poems being rather loose: there is no attempt to establish a concrete biography of Dietrich.

Almost all the poems about Dietrich are written in stanzas. Melodies for some of the stanzaic forms have survived, and they were probably meant to be sung. Several poems are written in rhyming couplets, however, a form more common for courtly romance or chronicles. These poems are *Dietrichs Flucht*, *Dietrich und Wenezlan*, most versions of *Laurin*, and some versions of the *Wunderer*.

The historical Dietrich poems in Middle High German consist of Dietrichs Flucht, Die Rabenschlacht, and *Alpharts Tod*, with the fragmentary poem Dietrich und Wenezlan as a possible fourth. These poems center around Dietrich's enmity with his wicked uncle Ermenrich, who wishes to dispose Dietrich of his father's kingdom. All involve Dietrich's flight from Ermenrich and exile at Etzel's court except *Alpharts Tod*, which takes place before Dietrich's expulsion, and all involve his battles against Ermenrich, except for *Dietrich und Wenezlan*, in which he fights against Wenezlan of Poland. All four postdate Dietrich's appearance in the Nibelungenlied. They are called historical because they concern war rather than adventure, and are seen as containing a warped version of Theodoric's life. Given the combination of elements also found in these texts with historical events in some chronicles, and the vehement denunciation of the saga by learned chroniclers, it is possible that these texts — or the oral tradition behind them — were themselves considered historical.

The majority of preserved narratives about Dietrich are fantastical in nature, involving battles against mythical beings and other heroes. The fantastical poems consist of the *Eckenlied*, *Goldemar*, *Laurin*, *Sigenot*, *Virginal*, the *Rosengarten zu Worms*, and the *Wunderer*.

These poems are generally regarded as containing newer material than the historical poems, though, as the Old English Waldere's references show, Dietrich was already associated with monsters at an early date. Many of the poems show a close connect to the Tyrol, and connections between them and Tyrolean folklore are often speculated upon, even in cases where the text itself clearly originated in a different German speaking area. Most of the poems seem to take place prior to Dietrich's exile, with the later traitors Witige and Heime still members of Dietrich's entourage, though not all: the *Eckenlied* prominently features references to the events of *Die Rabenschlacht* as already having taken place.

Different exemplars of the fantastical poems often show a huge degree of variation from each other (Germ. *Fassungsdivergenz*), a trait not found in the historical poems. Most fantastical poems have at least two versions containing substantial differences in the narrative, including inserting or removing entire episodes or altering the motivation of characters, etc. The scholar Harald Haferland has proposed that the differences may come from a practice of reciting entire poems from memory, using set formula to fill in lines and occasionally adding or deleting episodes. Haferland nevertheless believes that the poems were likely composed as written texts, and thus periodically new versions were written down.

The majority of the fantastical poems can be said to follow two basic narrative schemes, in some cases combining them: the liberation of a woman from a threatening legendary being, and the challenging of Dietrich to combat by some antagonist. The combinations of these schemes can at times lead to narrative breaks and inconsistencies in character motivation.

The two heroic epics *Ortnit* and *Wolfdietrich*, preserved in several widely varying versions, do not feature Dietrich von Bern directly but are strongly associated with the Dietrich cycle, and most versions share the strophic form of the Hildebrandston. These two poems, along with *Laurin* and *Rosengarten*, form the core of the Strassburg Heldenbuch and the later printed Heldenbücher, and are the first of the ten Dietrich poems in the Dresden Heldenbuch. In the Ambraser Heldenbuch they close the collection of heroic epics, which starts with *Dietrichs Flucht* and the *Rabenschlacht*.

The basis for the association is the identification of Wolfdietrich as the grandfather of Dietrich. This connection is attested as early as 1230 in the closing strophe of *Ortnit A*, is perpetuated by the inclusion of truncated versions of *Ortnit* and *Wolfdietrich* in *Dietrichs Flucht* among the stories of Dietrich's ancestors, and is repeated in the Heldenbuch-Prose of the 15th and 16th centuries, where Ortnit and Wolfdietrich are placed at the beginning of the Dietrich cycle. Scholars have sometimes supposed that *Wolfdietrich* tells the story of legends about Dietrich that somehow became disassociated from him. In the Old Norse *Thidreksaga*, Thidrek (Dietrich) plays Wolfdietrich's role as the avenger of Hertnid (Ortnit), which may suggest that the two heroes were once identical.

A further link is Dietrich's golden suit of impenetrable armour. This was originally received by Ortnit from his natural father, the dwarf Alberich. Ortnit is killed by a dragon who, being unable to kill him through his armour, sucks him out of it. When Wolfdietrich later avenges Ortnit by killing the dragon, he takes possession of the abandoned armour, and after his death it remains in the monastery to which he retired. In the *Eckenlied* we are told that the monastery later sold it to Queen Seburg for 50,000 marks, and she in turn gives it to Ecke. When Dietrich later defeats the giant, the armour finally passes into Dietrich's possession.

Biterolf and Dietleib is a heroic epic transmitted in the Ambraser Heldenbuch. It is closely related to the *Rosengarten zu Worms*. It tells the story of the heroes King Biterolf of Toledo and his son Dietleib, relatives of Walter of Aquitaine. The two heroes live at Etzel's court and receive Styria as a reward for their successful defense of Etzel's kingdom. In the second half of the work, there is a battle against the Burgundian heroes Gunther, Gernot, and Hagen at Worms, in which Dietleib avenges an earlier attempt by Hagen to prevent him from crossing the Rhine. Like the *Rosengarten*, Dietrich is featured fighting Siegfried, but he plays no larger role in the epic.

The *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* ("Younger Lay of Hildebrand") is a fifteenth-century heroic ballad, much like *Ermenrichs Tod*. Dietrich plays only a small role in this poem; it is an independent version of the same story found in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, but with a happy ending.

Ermenrichs Tod ("The Death of Ermenrich") is a garbled Middle Low German heroic ballad that relates a version of the death of Ermenrich that is similar in some ways to that portrayed in the story of Jonakr's sons and Svanhild, but at the hands of Dietrich and his men.

The Heldenbücher ("Books of Heroes", singular *Heldenbuch*) are collections of mainly heroic poems, in which those of the Dietrich cycle form a major constituent. In particular, the printed Heldenbücher, dating from the late 15th to the late 16th centuries, demonstrate the continuing appeal of the Dietrich tales, particularly the fantastical poems.[56] Generally, the printed Heldenbücher show a tendency to reduce the texts of the poems they collect in length: none of the longest Dietrich poems (*Dietrichs Flucht*, *Rabenschlacht*, *Virginal* V10) made the transition into print. Other longer Dietrich poems, such as the *Sigenot* and the *Eckenlied*, were printed independently, and remained popular even longer than the *Heldenbuch*—the last printing of *Sigenot* was in 1661.

Although not a *Heldenbuch* in the sense described above—the term originally included any collection of older literature—the Emperor Maximilian I was responsible for the creation of one of the most expensive and historically important manuscripts containing heroic poetry, the Ambraser Heldenbuch.

According to the Heldenbuch-Prosa, a prose preface to the manuscript Heldenbuch of Diebolt von Hanowe from 1480 and found in most printed versions, Dietrich is the grandson of Wolfdietrich and son of Dietmar. During her pregnancy, Dietrich's mother was visited by the demon Machmet (i.e. Mohammed imagined as a Muslim god), who prophecies that Dietrich will be the strongest spirit who ever lived and will breathe fire when angry. The devil (Machmet?) then builds Verona/Bern in three days. Ermenrich, here imagined as Dietrich's brother, rapes his marshal Sibiche's wife, whereupon Sibiche decides to advise Ermenrich to his own destruction. Thus he advises Ermenrich to hang his own nephews. Their ward, Eckehart of Breisach, informs Dietrich, and Dietrich declares war on Ermenrich. Ermenrich, however, captures Dietrich's best men, and to ransom them, Dietrich goes into exile. He ends up at Etzel's court, who gives Dietrich a large army that reconquers Verona. However, once Dietrich had fought at the rose garden against Siegfried, slaying him. This causes Kriemhild, who after Etzel's wife Herche's death, marries the Hun, to invite all the heroes of the world to a feast where she causes them to kill each other. Dietrich kills Kriemhild in revenge. Later there is a massive battle at Verona, in which all the remaining heroes except Dietrich are killed. At this a dwarf appears to Dietrich and, telling him that "his kingdom is no longer of this world," causes him to disappear. And no one knows what has happened to him.

The attempts to connect the heroic age with divine order and to remove Dietrich's demonic qualities are probably meant to deflect ecclesiastical criticism of heroic poetry. For instance, the author clearly attempts to hide negative characteristics of Dietrich, as with the Machmet-prophesy, which probably rests on the idea of Dietrich as the son of the Devil (as claimed by some in the church) and changing Dietrich's ride to hell into a positive event – the dwarf quotes John 18,36 when he takes Dietrich away.

Dietrich, as Thiodrek (Þjóðrekr), appears as an exile at the court of Atli (the Norse equivalent of Etzel) in two songs recorded in the so-called Poetic Edda. The most notable of these is Guðrúnarkviða III, in which Gudrun—the Old Norse equivalent of the German Krimehilt—is accused of adultery with Thiodrek by one of Atli's concubines, Herkja. Gudrun must perform an ordeal of hot water, in which she clears her name. After this, Herkja is killed. In Guðrúnarkviða II, Thiodrek and Gudrun recount the misfortunes that have befallen them. Thiodrek's presence in both songs is usually interpreted as coming from the influence of German traditions about Dietrich. Herkja's name is an exact linguistic equivalent of the name of Etzel's first wife in the German Dietrich and Nibelungen cycle, Helche. The poems also include the figure of Gudrun's mother, Grimhild, whose name is the linguistic equivalent of the German Kriemhilt and who takes on the latter's more villainous role. Most likely these two poems only date to the thirteenth century.

The Scandinavian *Þiðreks saga* (also *Þiðrekssaga*, *Thidreksaga*, *Thidrekssaga*, *Niflunga saga* or *Vilkina saga*) is a thirteenth-century Old Norse chivalric saga about Dietrich von Bern. The earliest manuscript dates from the late 13th century. It contains many narratives found in the known poems about Dietrich, but also supplements them with other narratives and provides many additional details. The text is either a translation of a lost Middle Low German prose narrative of Dietrich's life, or a compilation by a Norwegian author of German material. It is not clear how much of the source material might have been orally transmitted and how much the author may have had access to written poems. The preface of the text itself says that it was written according to "tales of German men" and "old German poetry", possibly transmitted by Hanseatic merchants in Bergen. It is known that the author of the "Heldenbuch-Prosa" did not have access to the *Þiðreks saga*.

At the center of the Thidrekssaga is a complete life of Dietrich. In addition to the life of Dietrich, various other heroes' lives are recounted as well in various parts of the story, including Attila, Wayland the Smith, Sigurd, the Nibelungen, and Walter of Aquitaine. The section recounting Dietrich's avenging of Hertnit seems to have resulted from a confusion between Dietrich and the similarly named Wolfdietrich.

Most of the action of the saga has been relocated to Northern Germany, with Attila's capital at Susat (Soest in Westphalia) and the battle described in the *Rabenschlacht* taking place at the (nonexistent) mouth of the Moselle to the sea.

Numerous ballads about Dietrich are attested in Scandinavia, primarily in Denmark, but also in Sweden and the Faroes. These texts seem to derive primarily from the Thidrekssaga, but there are signs of the use of German texts, such as the Laurin, which was translated into Danish, probably in the 1400s.

One of the most notable of the Danish ballads is *Kong Diderik og hans Kæmper* (King Dietrich and his Warriors, DgF 7) which is attested from the 16th century onwards, and is one of the most common ballads to be recorded in Danish songbooks.[74] This is actually most often found in both Danish and Swedish sources as two separate ballads with different refrains; the two ballads tell stories that closely, but not exactly, mirror episodes in the Didrik Saga where Didrik and his warriors travel to Bertanea / Birtingsland to fight against a King Ysung / Isingen. The first ballad, known in Swedish as *Widrik Werlandssons Kamp med Högben Rese* (Widrik Werlandsson's Fight with the Long-legged Troll, SMB 211, TSB E 119), tells of the journey to Birtingsland, and a fight with a troll in a forest on the way. The second, known in Swedish as *Tolv Starka Kämpar* (Twelve Strong Warriors, SMB 198, TSB E 10) tells of a series of duels between the youngest of Didrik's warriors and the formidable Sivard (Sigurd).

The Danish ballad *Kong Diderik og Løven* (King Didrik and the Lion, DgF 9, TSB E 158) for most of its narrative closely follows an episode from near the end of the Didrik Saga, telling how Didrik intervenes in a fight between a lion and a dragon. This was also one of the most common ballads to be recorded in Danish songbooks; it is not preserved in Swedish sources.

Another Danish ballad, *Kong Diderik i Birtingsland* (King Dietrich in Birtingsland, DgF 8, TSB E 7), is related to *Kong Diderik og hans Kæmper*, but it follows the Didrik Saga less closely.

The popularity of stories about Dietrich in Germany is already attested in the *Annals of Quedlinburg*. The quality of the surviving late medieval manuscripts and the choice to decorate castle rooms with scenes from the poems all point to a noble audience, even though there are also reports of the poems being read or sung at town fairs and in taverns. As one example, the Emperor Maximilian I's interest in heroic poetry about Dietrich is well documented. Not only was he responsible for the Ambraser Heldenbuch, he also decorated his planned grave monument with a large statue of Dietrich/Theodoric, next to other figures such as King Arthur.

Although the nobility maintained its interest in heroic poetry into the sixteenth century, it is also clear that the urban bourgeoisie of the late Middle Ages formed a growing part of the audience for the Dietrich poems, likely in imitation of the nobility. Heroic ballads such as *Ermenrichs Tod*, meanwhile, lost much of their noble associations and were popular in all societal classes. Beginning in the fourteenth century, many of the Dietrich poems were also used as sources for carnival plays with an obviously bourgeois audience. In the sixteenth century, the public for the poems seems to have become primarily bourgeois, and printed *Heldenbücher* rather than the oral tradition become the primary point of reference for the poems. The poems that had not been printed were no longer read and were forgotten. The *Sigenot* continued to be printed in the seventeenth century, the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* into the eighteenth, however, most of the printings of materials about Dietrich had ceased by 1600. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklorists were unable to find any living oral songs about Dietrich or other heroes in Germany as they could in some other countries, meaning that the oral tradition must have died before this point.

Despite, or because of, its popularity among many sectors of society, including members of the church, the Dietrich poems were frequent targets of criticism. Beginning with the universal chronicle of Frutolf of Michelsberg (eleventh century), writers of chronicles began to notice and object to the chronology of Dietrich/Theodoric being a contemporary of Ermanaric and Attila. Frutolf of Michelsberg, who developed a critical view of history and awareness of anachronism, pointed out that "some songs as 'vulgar fables' made Theoderic the Great, Attila and Ermanaric into contemporaries, when any reader of Jordanes knew that this was not the case". He suggests, that "either Jordanes or the Saga is wrong or the Saga is about another Ermanarich or another Dietrich".

The anonymous author of the German *Kaiserchronik* (c.1150) vehemently attacks this chronological impossibility as a lie. His insistence is perhaps a reflection of the strong believe of the historical truth of these stories among his target audience. Hugo von Trimberg, meanwhile, in his didactic poem *Der Renner* (c. 1300) accuses some women of crying more for Dietrich and Ecke than for Christ's wounds, while a fifteenth-century work complains that the laypeople think more about Dietrich von Bern than their own salvation. In the sixteenth century, despite continued criticism, there is evidence that preachers, including Martin Luther, frequently used stories about Dietrich von Bern as a way to catch their audience's interest, a not uncontroversial practice. Writers from Heinrich Wittenwiler to the German translator of Friedrich Dedekind's *Grobianus* associated the poems with uncouth peasants, whether or not they actually formed part of the poems' audiences.

Scholarly reception of the Dietrich poems, in the form of the *Heldenbuch*, began as early as the sixteenth century. The Baroque poets and scholars Martin Opitz and Melchior Goldast made use of the *Heldenbuch* as a convenient source of Middle High German expressions and vocabulary in their editions of medieval texts. Another notable example is the Lutheran theologian and historian Cyriacus von Spangenberg. In his *Mansfeldische Chronik* (1572), he explained that songs had about Dietrich/Theodoric had been composed for real historical occasions, so that they might not be forgotten, but clothed in allegory. He based this opinion on the report of Tacitus in *Germania* that the ancient Germans only recorded their history in songs. In Spangenberg's interpretation, the dwarf king Laurin's cloak of invisibility, for instance, becomes a symbol for Laurin's secrecy and sneakiness. In his *Adels Spiegel* (printed 1591-1594), Cyriacus interprets the stories about Dietrich as examples for ideal noble behavior, and continues his allegorical interpretations, stating that the dragons and giants represent tyrants, robbers, etc., while the dwarfs represent the peasantry and bourgeoisie, etc. This tradition of interpretation would continue into the eighteenth century, when Gotthold Ephraim Lessing interprets the poems of the *Heldenbuch* in a very similar fashion, and as late as 1795, Johann Friedrich Schütze argued that the poems were allegories for medieval historical events.

The medieval poems about Dietrich never attained the same status as the *Nibelungenlied* among nineteenth-century enthusiasts for the German past, despite repeated attempts to reanimate the material through reworkings and retellings. The most ambitious of these was by Karl Simrock, the translator of the *Nibelungenlied*, who sought to write a new German epic, composed in the "Nibelungenstanza", using material from the *Thidrekssaga* and select poems of the Dietrich cycle. He called his project the *Amelungenlied* (song of the Amelungs). Despite a warm reception among connoisseurs, the poem was never popular. The poem remains unpopular and unknown today, at least partially due to its strong nationalistic tone.

Of all the Dietrich poems, the *Laurin* was most frequently rewritten and reimagined during the nineteenth-century, and it is the poem with the greatest currency today. The reworkings, which included longer poems and pieces for the theater, frequently connected *Laurin* to elements of other Dietrich poems, especially the *Virginal*. This led to the *Laurin*, together with the reimagined *Virginal*, attaining something of the status of folktales in Tyrol and South Tyrol. Much of the credit for the continued interest in Dietrich and Laurin in Tyrol can be given to the journalist and saga-researcher Karl Felix Wolff. In 1907, the city of Bozen (Bolzano) in South Tyrol erected a Laurin fountain, depicting Dietrich wrestling Laurin to the ground.

Hildebrandslied

The ***Hildebrandslied*** (German: [ˈhɪldəbʁantsˌliːt]; *Lay* or *Song of Hildebrand*) is a heroic lay written in Old High German alliterative verse. It is the earliest poetic text in German, and it tells of the tragic encounter in battle between a father (Hildebrand) and a son (Hadubrand) who does not recognize him. It is the only surviving example in German of a genre which must have been important in the oral literature of the Germanic tribes.

The text was written in the 830s on two spare leaves on the outside of a religious codex in the monastery of Fulda. The two scribes were copying from an unknown older original, which itself must ultimately have derived from oral tradition. The story of Hildebrand and Hadubrand almost certainly goes back to 7th- or 8th-century Lombardy and is set against the background of the historical conflict between Theodoric and Odoacer in 5th-century Italy, which became a major subject for Germanic heroic legend. The fundamental story of the father and son who fail to recognize each other on the battlefield is much older and is found in a number of Indo-European traditions.

The manuscript itself has had an eventful history: twice looted in war but eventually returned to its rightful owner, twice moved to safety shortly before devastating air-raids, repeatedly treated with chemicals by 19th-century scholars, once almost given to Hitler, and torn apart and partly defaced by dishonest book dealers. It now resides, on public display, in a secure vault in the Murhard Library in Kassel.

The text is highly problematic: as a unique example of its genre, with many words not found in other German texts, its interpretation remains controversial. Difficulties in reading some of the individual letters and identifying errors made by the scribes mean that a definitive edition of the poem is impossible. One of the most puzzling features is the dialect, which shows a mixture of High German and Low German spellings which cannot represent any actually spoken dialect.

In spite of the many uncertainties over the text and continuing debate on the interpretation, the poem is widely regarded as the first masterpiece of German literature.

There can surely be no poem in world literature the exposition and development of which are terser and more compelling.
—*A. T. Hatto*

The opening lines of the poem set the scene: two warriors meet on a battlefield, probably as the champions of their two armies.

As the older man, Hildebrand opens by asking the identity and genealogy of his opponent. Hadubrand reveals that he did not know his father but the elders told him his father was Hildebrand, who fled eastwards in the service of Dietrich (Theodoric) to escape the wrath of Otacher (Odoacer), leaving behind a wife and small child. He believes his father to be dead.

Hildebrand responds by saying that Hadubrand will never fight such a close kinsman (an indirect way of asserting his paternity) and offers gold arm-rings he had received as a gift from the Lord of the Huns (the audience would have recognized this as a reference to Attila, whom according to legend Theodoric served).

Hadubrand takes this as a ruse to get him off guard and belligerently refuses the offer, accusing Hildebrand of deception, and perhaps implying cowardice. Hildebrand accepts his fate and sees that he cannot honourably refuse battle: he has no choice but to kill his own son or be killed by him.

They start to fight, and the text concludes with their shields smashed. But the poem breaks off in the middle of a line, not revealing the outcome.

The text consists of 68 lines of alliterative verse, though written continuously with no consistent indication of the verse form. It breaks off in mid-line, leaving the poem unfinished at the end of the second page. However, it does not seem likely that much more than a dozen lines are missing.

The poem starts:

I heard tell - Ik gihorta ðat seggen
The warriors met in single combat - ðat sih urhettun ænon muotin
Hildebrand and Hadubrand between two armies - Hiltibrant enti Haðubrant untar heriun tuem
son and father prepared their armour - sunufatarungo iro saro rihtun
made ready their battle garments girded on their swords - garutun se iro guðhamun gurtun sih iro suert ana
the warriors, over their ring mail when they rode to battle - helidos ubar hringa do sie to dero hiltiu ritun

The basic structure of the poem comprises a long passage of dialogue, framed by introductory and closing narration. A more detailed analysis is offered by McLintock:

*1.**Introductory narrative** (ll. 1–6): The warriors meet and prepare for combat.*
*2.**Hildebrand's 1st speech**, with introductory formula and characterization (ll. 7–13): Hildebrand asks his opponent's identity.*
*3.**Hadubrand's 1st speech**, with introductory formula (ll. 14–29): Hadubrand names himself, tells how his father left with Dietrich, and that he believes him to be dead.*

*4.**Hildebrand's 2nd Speech** (ll. 30–32): Hildebrand indicates his close kinship with Hadubrand.*
***Narrative** (ll. 33–35a): Hildebrand removes an arm-ring*
***Hildebrand's 3rd speech** (l. 35b): and offers it to Hadubrand.*
*5.**Hadubrand's 2nd speech**, with introductory formula (ll. 36–44): Hadubrand rejects the proffered arm-ring, accuses Hildebrand of trying to trick him, and reasserts his belief that his father is dead.*
*6.**Hildebrand's 4th speech**, with introductory formula (ll. 45–62): Hildebrand comments that Hadubrand's good armour shows he has never been an exile. Hildebrand accepts his fate, affirming that it would be cowardly to refuse battle and challenging Hadubrand to win his armour.*
*7.**Closing narrative** (ll. 63–68): The warriors throw spears, close for combat and fight until their shields are destroyed.*

While this structure accurately represents the surviving manuscript text, many scholars have taken issue with the position of ll. 46–48 ("I can see from your armour that you have a good lord at home and that you were never exiled under this regime"). In these lines, as it stands, Hildebrand comments on Hadubrand's armour and contrasts his son's secure existence with his own exile. Such a measured observation perhaps seems out of keeping with the confrontational tone of the surrounding conversation. Many have suggested, therefore, that the lines should more correctly be given to Hadubrand — from his mouth they become a challenge to Hildebrand's story of exile — and placed elsewhere. The most widely accepted placing is after l. 57, after Hildebrand has challenged Hadubrand to take an old man's armour. This has the advantage that it seems to account for the extraneous *quad Hiltibrant* in ll. 49 and 58, which would normally be expected to introduce a new speaker and seem redundant (as well as hypermetrical) in the manuscript version. Alternatively, De Boor would place the lines earlier, before l.33, where Hildebrand offers an arm-ring. However, more recently the trend has been to accept the placing of these lines and see the task as making sense of the text as it stands.

In spite of the text's use of spare space in an existing manuscript, there is evidence that it was prepared with some care: the two sheets were ruled with lines for the script, and in a number of places letters have been erased and corrected.

Nonetheless, some features of the text are hard to interpret as anything other than uncorrected errors. Some of these are self-evident copying errors, due either to misreading of the source or the scribe losing his place. An example of the latter is the repetition of *darba gistuotun* in l. 26b, which is hypermetrical and gives no sense – the copyist's eye must have been drawn to the *Detrihhe darba gistuontun* of l.23 instead of to the *Deotrichhe* in l.26b. Other obvious copying errors include *mih* for *mir* (l.13) and *fatereres* for *fateres* (l.24).

It seems also that the scribes were not entirely familiar with the script used in their source. The inconsistencies in the use and form of the *wynn*-rune, for example — sometimes with and sometimes without an acute stroke above the letter, once corrected from the letter *p* — suggest this was a feature of the source which was not a normal part of their scribal repertoire.

While these issues are almost certainly the responsibility of the Fulda scribes, in other cases an apparent error or inconsistency might already have been present in their source. The variant spellings of the names *Hiltibrant/Hiltibraht*, *Hadubrant/Hadubraht*, *Theotrihhe/Detriche/Deotrichhe*. were almost certainly present in the source. In several places, the absence of alliteration linking the two halves of a line suggests missing text, so ll.10a and 11b, which follow each other in the manuscript (*fireo ın folche • eddo welıhhes cnuosles du sis*, "who his father was in the host • or what family you belong to"), do not make a well-formed alliterating line and in addition display an abrupt transition between third-person narrative and second-person direct speech. The phrase *quad hiltibrant* ("said Hildebrand") in lines 49 and 58 (possibly line 30 also) breaks the alliteration and seems to be a hypermetrical scribal addition to clarify the dialogue.

In addition to errors and inconsistencies, there are other features of the text which make it hard to interpret. Some words are hapax legomena (unique to the text), even if they sometimes have cognates in other Germanic languages. Examples include *urhetto* ("challenger"), *billi* ("battle axe") and *gudhamo* ("armour"). Since the *Hildebrandslied* is the earliest poetic text and the only heroic lay in German, and is the oldest heroic lay in any Germanic language, it is difficult to establish whether such words enjoyed broader currency in the 9th century or belonged to a (possibly archaic) poetic language.

The text's punctuation is limited: the only mark used is a sporadic punctus (•), and identifying clause and sentence boundaries is not always straightforward. Since the manuscript gives no indication of the verse form, line divisions are the judgments of modern editors.

Finally, the mixture of language features, mostly High German (Upper German) but with some highly characteristic Low German forms, means that the text could never have reflected the spoken language of an individual speaker and never been meant for performance.

Frederick Norman concludes, "The poem presents puzzles alike to palaeographers, linguists and literary historians."

The manuscript of the *Hildebrandslied* is now in the Murhardsche Bibliothek in Kassel (signature 2° Ms. Theol. 54). The codex consists of 76 folios containing two books of the Vulgate Old Testament (the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus) and

the homilies of Origen. It was written in the 820s in Anglo-Saxon minuscule and Carolingian minuscule hands. The text of the *Hildebrandslied* was added in the 830s on the two blank outside leaves of the codex (1r and 76v).

The poem breaks off in the midst of the battle and there has been speculation that the text originally continued on a third sheet (now lost) or on the endpaper of the (subsequently replaced) back cover. However, it is also possible that the text was being copied from an incomplete original or represented a well-known episode from a longer story.

The *Hildebrandslied* text is the work of two scribes, of whom the second wrote only seven and a half lines (11 lines of verse) at the beginning of the second leaf. The scribes are not the same as those of the body of the codex. The hands are mainly Carolingian minuscule. However, a number of features, including the *wynn*-rune (ƿ) used for *w* suggest Old English influence, not surprising in a house founded by Anglo-Saxon missionaries.

The manuscript pages now show a number of patches of discoloration. These are the results of attempts by earlier scholars to improve the legibility of the text with chemical agents.

The manuscript's combination of Bavarian dialect and Anglo-Saxon palaeographic features make Fulda the only monastery where it could have been written. With its missionary links to North Germany, Fulda is also the most likely origin for the earlier version of the poem in which Old Saxon features were first introduced. In around 1550 the codex was listed in the monastery's library catalogue.

In 1632, during the Thirty Years War, the monastery was plundered and destroyed by Hessian troops. While most of the library's manuscripts were lost, the codex was among a number of stolen items later returned to the Landgraves of Hesse-Kassel and placed in the Court Library. In the aftermath of the political crisis of 1831, under the terms of Hesse's new constitution the library passed from the private possession of the landgraves to public ownership and became the Kassel State Library (*Landesbibliothek*).

In 1937 there was a proposal to make a gift of the manuscript to Adolf Hitler, but this was thwarted by the library's director, Wilhelm Hopf.

At the start of the Second World War, the manuscript, along with 19 others, was moved from the State Library to the underground vault of a local bank. This meant that it was not harmed in the Allied bombing raid in September 1941, which destroyed almost all the library's holdings. In August 1943 the codex (along with the Kassel Willehalm codex) was moved for safe keeping out of Kassel completely to a bunker in Bad Wildungen, south-west of the city, just in time to escape the devastating air-raids the following October, which destroyed the whole of the city centre. After the capture of Bad Wildungen by units of the US Third Army in March 1945, the bunker was looted and the codex went missing. An official investigation by the US Military Government failed to discover its fate. In November 1945 it was sold by US army officer Bud Berman to the Rosenbach Company, rare book dealers in Philadelphia. At some point the first folio, with the first page of the Hildebrandslied, was removed (presumably in order to disguise the origin of the codex, since that sheet carried the library's stamp). In 1950, even though the Pierpont Morgan Library had raised questions about the provenance of the codex and the Rosenbachs must have known it was looted, it was sold to the Californian bibliophile Carrie Estelle Doheny and placed in the Edward Laurence Doheny Memorial Library in Camarillo. In 1953 the codex was traced to this location, and in 1955 it was returned to Kassel. However, it was only in 1972 that the missing first folio (and the Kassel *Willehalm*) was rediscovered in the Rosenbach Museum and reunited with the codex.

The manuscript is now on permanent display in the Murhard Library.

Attention was first drawn to the codex and the Hildebrandslied by Johann Georg von Eckhart, who published the first edition of the poem in 1729. This included a hand-drawn facsimile of the start of the text, with a full transcription, a Latin translation and detailed glosses of the vocabulary. His translation shows a considerable range of errors and misconceptions (Hildebrand and Hadubrand are seen as cousins, for example, who meet on the way to battle). Also, he did not recognize the text as verse, and its historical significance consequently remained unappreciated.

Both the fact and the historical significance of the alliterative verse form were first recognized by the Brothers Grimm in their 1812 edition, which also showed improved transcription and understanding compared to Eckhart's, This is generally regarded as the first scholarly edition and there have been many since.

Wilhelm Grimm went on to publish the first facsimile of the manuscript in 1830, by which time he had recognized the two different hands and the oral origin of the poem. He had also become the first to use reagents in an attempt to clarify the text.

The first photographic facsimile was published by Sievers in 1872. This clearly shows the damage caused by the reagents used by Grimm and his successors.

One of the most puzzling features of the *Hildebrandslied* is its language, which is a mixture of Old High German (with some specifically Bavarian features) and Old Saxon.[64] For example, the first person pronoun appears both in the Old Saxon form *ik* and the Old High German *ih*. The reason for the language mixture is unknown, but it seems certain it cannot have been the work of the last scribes and was already present in the original which they copied.

The Old Saxon features predominate in the opening part of the poem and show a number of errors, which argue against an Old Saxon original. The alliteration of *riche* and *reccheo* in line 48 is often regarded as conclusive: the equivalent Old Saxon forms, *rīke* and *wrekkio*, do not alliterate and would have given a malformed line. Earlier scholars envisaged an Old Saxon original, but an Old High German original is now universally accepted.

The errors in the Old Saxon features suggest that the scribe responsible for the dialect mixture was not thoroughly familiar with the dialect. Forms such as *heittu* (l.17) and *huitte* (l.66) (Modern German *heißen* and *weiß*) are mistakes for Old Saxon spellings with a single ⟨t⟩. They suggest a scribe who does not realise that Old High German *zz*, resulting from the High German consonant shift, corresponds to *t* in Old Saxon in these words, not *tt*, that is, a scribe who has limited first-hand knowledge of Old Saxon.

The origin of the Dietrich legend in Northern Italy also suggests a southern origin is more likely.

The East Franconian dialect of Fulda was High German, but the monastery was a centre of missionary activity to Northern Germany. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume there was some knowledge of Old Saxon there, and perhaps even some Old Saxon speakers. However, the motivation for attempting a translation into Old Saxon remains inscrutable, and attempts to link it with Fulda's missionary activity among the Saxons remain speculative.

An alternative explanation treats the dialect as homogeneous, interpreting it as representative of an archaic poetic idiom.

Legendary material about Hildebrand survived in Germany into the 17th century and also spread to Scandinavia, though the forms of names vary. A number of analogues either portray or refer to Hildebrand's combat with his son:

In Book VII of the *Gesta Danorum* (early 13th century), Hildiger reveals as he is dying that he has killed his own son.

- In the 13th century Old Norse *Þiðreks saga*, based on lost Low German sources, Hildibrandr defeats his son, Alibrandr. Alibrandr offers his sword in surrender but attempts to strike Hildibrandr as he reaches for it. Hildibrandr taunts him for having been taught to fight by a woman, but then asks if he is Alibrandr and they are reconciled.

- The Early New High German *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* (first attested in the fifteenth century) tells a similar story of the treacherous blow, the taunt that the son was taught to fight by a woman, and the final reconciliation.
- In the 14th century Old Norse *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, Hildibrandr laments being forced to slay his son:

The beloved son lies there behind at my head - Liggr þar inn svási || sonr at höfði
the heir whom I begot - eptir, erfingi, || er ek eiga gat;
unwillingly I deprived [him] of life - óviljandi || aldrs synjaðak.

- In the Faroese ballad *Snjólvskvæði*, Hildebrand is tricked into killing his son.

There are three legends in other Indo-European traditions about an old hero who must fight his son and kills him after distrusting his claims of kinship:

- In Irish medieval literature, the hero Cú Chulainn kills his son Conlaí.
- In the Persian epic tale Shahnameh, Rostam kills his son Sohrab.
- In a popular Rus' *Bylina* Ilya Muromets kills his son Podsokolnik.
- In a passage of the Mahabharata, it is the son (Babruvahana) who kills his unidentified father (Arjuna), though the latter is later revived.
- In the lost ancient Greek epic poem Telegony, Odysseus is killed by Telegonus, his son by Circe.

While the conclusion of the Hildebrandslied is missing, the consensus is that the evidence of the analogues supports the death of Hadubrand as the outcome of the combat. Even though some of the later medieval versions end in reconciliation, this can be seen as a concession to the more sentimental tastes of a later period. The heroic ethos of an earlier period would leave Hildebrand no choice but to kill his son after the dishonourable act of the treacherous stroke. There is some evidence that this original version of the story survived into the 13th century in Germany: the Minnesänger Der Marner refers to a poem about the death of young Alebrand.

The poet of the Hildebrandslied has to explain how father and son could fail to know each other. To do so, he has set the encounter against the background of the Dietrich legend based on the life of Theodoric the Great, an important subject in Germanic heroic legend.

Historically, Theodoric invaded Italy in 489, defeated and killed the ruling King of Italy, Odoacer, to establish his own Ostrogothic Kingdom. Theodoric ruled from 493 to 526, but the kingdom was destroyed by the Eastern Emperor Justinian I in 553, and thereafter the invading Lombards seized control of Northern Italy. By this time the story of Theodoric's conflict with Odoacer had been recast, contrary to historical fact, as a tale of Theodoric's return from exile, thus justifying his war on Odoacer as an act of revenge rather than an unprovoked attack.

In the Dietrich legend, Hildebrand is a senior warrior in Theodoric's army (in the Nibelungenlied he is specifically Dietrich's armourer). However, there is no evidence of a historical Hildebrand, and since names in *-brand* are overwhelmingly Lombard rather than Gothic, it seems certain that the tale of Hildebrand and Hadubrand was first linked with the legend of Theodoric's exile by a Lombard rather than a Gothic poet. However, attention has been drawn to the fact that one of Theodoric's' generals bore the nickname *Ibba*. While this could not have been a nickname for *Hildebrand* among the Goths, it might have been so interpreted later among the Lombards.

In the later re-tellings of the Dietrich legend, Theodoric is driven into exile not by Odoacer but by Ermanaric (in historical fact a 4th century King of the Goths), which suggests that the earliest version of the Hildebrandslied was created when the legend still had some loose connection to the historical fact of the conflict with Odoacer. This first version of the story would probably have been composed some time in the 7th century, though it is impossible to tell how close it is in form to the surviving version.

The oral transmission of a Lombard poem northwards to Bavaria would have been facilitated by the fact that the Langobardic and Bavarian dialects were closely related forms of Upper German, connected via the Alpine passes. The two peoples were also connected by dynastic marriages and cultural contacts throughout the history of the Lombard Kingdom. By the late 8th century, both the Lombard Kingdom and the Duchy of Bavaria had been incorporated into the Frankish Empire.

The evidence of the phonology of the Hildebrandslied is that the first written version of this previously oral poem was set down in Bavaria in the 8th century.

While Fulda was an Anglo-Saxon foundation located in the East Franconian dialect area, it had strong links with Bavaria: Sturmi, the first abbot of Fulda, was a member of the Bavarian nobility, and Bavarian monks had a considerable presence at the monastery. This is sufficient to account for a Bavarian poem in Fulda by the end of the 8th Century. Fulda also had links with Saxony, evidenced by its missionary activity among the Saxons and the Saxon nobles named in the monastery's annals. This makes it uniquely placed for the attempt to introduce Saxon features into a Bavarian text, though the motivation for this remains a mystery. This Saxonised version then, in the 830s, served as the source of the surviving manuscript.

In summary, the probable stages in transmission are:

1.Lombard original (7th century)
2.Bavarian adaptation (8th century)
3.Reception in Fulda (8th century)
4.Saxonised version (c. 800?)
5.Surviving version (830s)
A final issue is the motivation of the two scribes for copying the Hildebrandslied. Among the suggestions are:

- Antiquarian interest
- A connection with Charlemagne's impulse to collect ancient songs
- Interest in the legal questions the song raises
- A negative example, possibly for missionary purposes: the tragic result of adhering to outdated heroic rather than Christian ethics
- A commentary on the fraught relationship between Louis the Pious and his sons.

There is no consensus on the answer to this question.

Ortnit

Ortnit is the eponymous protagonist of the Middle High German heroic epic *Ortnit*. First written down in strophic form in around 1230 by an anonymous author, it circulated in a number of distinct versions.

In the earliest version, King Ortnit sets out on an expedition to make the daughter of the heathen King Machorel his bride. He is greatly assisted by the cunning of the dwarf Alberich, who can only be seen by the wearer of a magic ring, and by the martial prowess of the Russian king Ilyas, Ortnit's uncle. In the second part of the story, Machorel, enraged by Ortnit's abduction of his daughter, sends him, in a feigned gesture of reconciliation, two dragon eggs. When these hatch, the dragons terrorise the land. After a year's delay, Ortnit sets out to kill the dragons, but falls asleep and is killed by them.

In most of the surviving versions, this is followed by the story of Wolfdietrich, who avenges Ortnit's death and marries his widow. Though the two stories have distinct origins, they were possibly combined and integrated at an early stage. The earliest surviving versions, *Ortnit A* and *Wolfdietrich A* may be the work of a single author.

The bride-quest and dragon motifs come from older oral traditions, but a strong crusading element in the journey to the Levant and defeat of a heathen army reflects the concerns of the 13th century. There is no consensus about the origins of the figure of Ortnit himself.

With a dozen manuscripts, six printed editions and a theatrical adaptation, the story remained popular right up until the early 17th century.

The story of Ortnit survives in eight narrative versions, grouped in four main traditions:

Ortnit A (also **Ortnit AW**, after the two manuscripts) is the oldest version, written around 1230, containing 597 strophes. A later adaptation in the Dresden Heldenbuch condenses the text to about a third of the length.

Ortnit C survives only in two fragments containing around 60 strophes of *Ortnit* with material close to that of Ortnit A.

Ortnit D, written around 1300, combines material from version C and a further, unknown version. Version D survives in four different variants from the 15th and 16th centuries:

- **a** 560 strophes, five manuscripts
- **e** 497 strophes, four manuscripts, including the manuscript version of the Strassburg Heldenbuch
- **y** 443 strophes, one manuscript
- **z** 555 strophes, the six printed editions of the Strassburg Heldenbuch.

A verse drama in rhyming couplets by Jakob Ayrer published in 1618, *Vom dem keiser Ottnit, was er biss and sein Endt erstritten und ausgericht, auff das Getreulichst der Histori nach* is based on Ortnit D.

Wolfdietrich B is not accompanied by a separate *Ortnit* tale. Instead, the stories are integrated: Wolfdietrich meets Ortnit, defeats him in battle and gains his friendship; Ortnit later kills two giants and a dragon but is then killed in his sleep by a second dragon.

Ortnit A

I. (Strophes 1–69) In his castle at Garda, King Ortnit of Lambarten (Lombardy) tells his vassals that he means to seek a wife, and one of them, his uncle Ilyas, King of Russia, mentions the beautiful daughter of Machorel of Muntabur (Mount Tabor), a heathen king. In spite of the fact that Machorel kills any suitor for his daughter, intending to marry her himself once his wife is dead, Ortnit sets his heart on her.

II. (70–212) Delayed from setting out by winter weather, he is given a ring by his mother, who tells him it will lead to adventure. Following her instructions, he rides off into the wilderness until he encounters what he takes to be a child, who can only be seen by the one wearing the ring. After they have argued and fought - the child is unexpectedly strong - the child reveals himself to be the dwarf Alberich and Ortnit's natural father (having stepped in when Ortnit's parents were unable to conceive). He gives Ortnit a suit of golden armour with magical properties and vows to accompany him.

III. (213–287) Ortnit and his army set sail from Messina and, after 10 days at sea, arrive off the coast of Tyre, Machorel's capital. Alberich gives Ortnit a magic stone which allows him to speak and understand any language, and this enables him to pose as a merchant to secure permission to dock. Ortnit wants to take the city immediately, riding through the open gates, but Alberich insists this would be dishonourable. Instead, Alberich goes to Muntabur and gives Machorel a formal challenge: to give his daughter to Ortnit or be attacked. Machorel refuses and flies into a range.

IV. (288–346) That night Alberich steals hundreds of small boats from the harbour and the army uses these to land. At dawn, the alarm is given in the city and fierce fighting ensues. Alberich notices that all the city gates are open and the heathens may escape and burn the ships. Leaving Ilyas to continue the main battle, Ortnit gives chase. Returning, successful, he finds that Ilyas has lost all his men, and he re-engages to avenge their deaths. With the battle over, Ilyas is shown a cellar where the remaining heathen warriors are hiding and he beheads all of them in revenge, but Ortnit prevents him from killing the women and children. Attending to the wounded, Ortnit laments the many men he has lost.

V. (347–483) At dawn, they set off for Muntabur. On arrival they pitch their tents outside the castle, but are too close and are shot at from the ramparts. That night, however, Alberich steals into the castle and throws the bows and arrows into the moat. Believing this to be the work of the devil, the heathens pressure the queen to let Ortnit have her daughter. But the king rejects the suggestion angrily. The next day, battle is joined. Distressed at the battle and the danger to her father's life, the princess prays to Apollo and Mohammed. Alberich pretends to be a messenger from (the Christian) God but even so cannot persuade the girl to marry Ortnit, until she challenges him to prove he is stronger than her gods, whereupon he shatters her shrine and throws it into the moat. The princess relents in order to spare her father, and sends her ring to Ortnit. Battle ceases and the heathens withdraw into the castle. Alberich sneaks in and brings out the princess to Ortnit, who rides off with her. As soon as her father discovers she is missing he rides in pursuit of Ortnit with his army. In the ensuing battle, the heathen army is completely destroyed, though Machorel escapes to the safety of the castle. Ortnit sets sail and, after the princess has been baptized, they marry.

VI. (484–526) Machorel is visited by a huntsman, who has stolen two eggs from a dragon's cave and offers to take them to Lombardy to hatch so that they can then devastate Ortnit's land. Machorel agrees and sends the huntsman to Lombardy with gifts. Ortnit and his wife are delighted at these signs of reconciliation. After he has shown these to Ortnit, the huntsman reveals that one gift, an elephant, must be left to grow before being given. Ortnit orders the huntsman to be shown to a suitable cave in the mountains and given provisions. As the dragons grow the provisions start to become inadequate and dragons start to devastate the land in their search for food. After a year, in which knights have failed to defeat the dragons, Ortnit decides that he must take on the task himself.

VII. (527–575) During an emotional parting from his wife, who tries to dissuade him, Ortnit tells her that if he fails to return, the knight who comes back with his armour, his ring and the dragon's tongue, will have avenged his death. Alberich refuses to accompany Ortnit, but warns him not to fall asleep. After a day and night wandering at random without finding the dragon, he sits down to rest but is overcome by sleep. When the dragon approaches, Ortnit's hound attempts to wake him, but without success. The dragon gulps him down whole, and, returning to its lair, feeds him to its young, who suck Ortnit out through his armour.

VIII. (576–597) The hound returns to court, and the queen eventually realises that Ortnit is not following it and must be dead. This is confirmed when a vassal follows the hound to where Ortnit was killed. For two years the queen mourns and, is spite of the urging of the court, refuses to remarry unless it's to the knight who avenges Ortnit. For her refusal she is deprived of her wealth and imprisoned in a tower. The margrave takes pity on her and offers to avenge Ortnit, but only once he has a grown son to be his heir. Meanwhile, he sends food and wine to her in the tower. The story concludes with the remark that we will have to wait a long time for the dragon to be killed, as the killer has not yet been born, he who will later be the grandfather of Dietrich of Verona.

Ortnit D

This version follows that of *Ortnit A* up to the point where the dragons are terrorising the country, at which point it concludes. It is followed in the manuscript and prints with the story of Hugdietrich's bride quest, which then leads into the story of Wolfdietrich, which, in this version, includes Ortnit's pursuit of the dragon and his death.

After telling of Wolfdietrich's youth, the story introduces the emperor Ortnit, who is told by one of his courtiers of Hugdietrich, King of Greece, and his three sons, who do no fealty to Ortnit. Ortnit sends twelve counts to Hugdietrich to demand tribute. Although the sons threaten to resist violently any claim for tribute, Hugdietrich, in order to save lives, pays in gold. However, Wolfdietrich warns that when he is full grown he will challenge Ortnit.

After Wolfdietrich has married Sigeminne, he decides to follow up his earlier threat to challenge Ortnit. He defeats Ortnit in battle, the two are then reconciled. When Sigeminne is abducted, Ortnit offers to help and they succeed in rescuing her.

Ortnit returns home to find his land being terrorised by two dragons and two giants, Velle and his wife Runze. After killing the giants, he sets out to kill the dragons, but after he has killed the first with the help of an elephant, he mysteriously falls asleep. He wakes up to find himself being carried off by the dragon, and in spite of his attempts to resist he is smashed against a tree and killed.

While the earliest manuscripts of *Ortnit* date from the 14th century, the language of the poem suggests composition around 1230 in an Upper German dialect. The name Machorel and the castle of Muntabur seem to be borrowed from the campaign of 1217 in the Fifth Crusade against Sultan al-Malek al-Adel and his fortress at Mount Tabor.

Attempts to derive the story or the figure of Ortnit from Germanic myth or historical personages have not been successful. The many German bride-quest stories, which include *Ortnit*, König Rother, Orendel and Salman und Morolf, have their roots in late Merovingian history: chronicles contain a number of self-contained bride-quest stories, based ultimately on the Frankish King Clovis I's wooing of Clotilde in 492. All involve a hero travelling to a foreign country to win a bride.

The name Ortnit is cognate with the name Hertnið shared by five different characters in the Þiðreks saga, one of whom is defeated in a battle against a dragon. This suggests a variety of possibly unconnected Ortnit/Hertnið stories were circulating in Northern Germany. The figure of Ortnit's uncle, Ilias, is thought to be derived from the Russian folk hero Ilya Muromets. Northern Germany is the obvious location for the integration of such a character into an Ortnit story.

A parallel with the chanson de geste Huon de Bordeaux has also been noted: in *Huon* the hero is aided by Auberon, a dwarf with supernatural powers, whose name is cognate with *Alberich*.

Taken together, all these suggest a geographical origin in Northwest Germany, but the story seems to have been constructed from a variety of elements, not simply retelling an "Ortnit-saga". It is unclear whether the bride-quest and dragon-killing stores first became linked in the Northwest or in Southern Germany, though it seems possible that Ortnit's failure to kill the dragon was necessitated only when his story was linked with Wolfdietrich.

Ortnit and *Wolfdietrich* are both written in a strophic form called the *Hildebrandston* (similar to the Nibelungenstrophe used in the Nibelungenlied and Kudrun). It consists of four long-lines: each long-line has three feet with a feminine ending, a caesura, then three feet with a rhymed masculine ending.

Ortnit A
There grew up in Lombardy a rich and powerful king - 3. Iz wuhse in Lambarten || ein gewaltich kunec reich
In his day there was no king his equal - dem waz bei den zeiten || dehein kunec gleich
in all the lands of Italy. This is shown by the fact - uber elle lant ze Walhen || daz bezaichent daz
that as long as he lived he was a powerful ruler - die wuile und das er lebte || daz er gewalticlichen saz.

The strophes are marked in the manuscripts by a Lombardic capital.

In the printed Heldenbücher, the *Hildebrandston* is transformed into the *Heunenweise*, an eight-line strophe: the long-line is split at the caesura and unrhymed line-endings are given rhymes, with the resulting rhyme scheme ABABCDCD. This necessarily involved considerable rewriting of the text:

Ortnit D, Augsburger Heldenbuch, 1491
There ruled in Lombardy - 2. Ez saß do in lamparten
A rich and noble king - Ein edeler künig reych
In a castle called Garte - Auff einer burg hieß garten
His equal was not to be found - Man fandt nit seinem geleych
He was called Lord Otnit - Man nannt in her otniten
As I have heard tell - Als ichs vernomen han
You could find in those days - Man fandt zuo den gezeyten
No prince so praiseworthy - Kein fürsten so lobesan

Wolfdietrich

Wolfdietrich is the eponymous protagonist of the Middle High German heroic epic *Wolfdietrich*. First written down in strophic form in around 1230 by an anonymous author, it survives in four main versions, widely differing in scope and content, and largely independent of each other.

Wolfdietrich is closely associated with another heroic epic poem of the same period, *Ortnit*. The two stories have distinct (if disputed) origins but they were combined at an early stage, possibly by a single author, and appear together in most sources. In the earliest surviving version of the first story, Ortnit is killed by two dragons sent by his father-in-law after he abducts and marries his daughter; in the second, Wolfdietrich, deprived of his inheritance by two brothers and an evil counsellor, sets out to seek Ortnit's help but, finding he has been killed, avenges him by killing the dragons, he then defeats his brothers and the counsellor, and marries Ortnit's widow.

While the earliest version is similar to other heroic epics such as the Nibelungenlied, the tale gradually accretes more episodes, becoming a popular adventure story.

With their motifs of the bride-quest, inheritance regained, faithful and faithless vassals, dragon-killing, magic suits of armour, and encounters with dwarves, witches and giants, this pair of stories remained continuously popular, repeatedly re-cast, copied and, later, printed until the early 17th century. This makes it one of the most long-lived and popular German narratives of the medieval and early modern period.

Though *Wolfdietrich* and *Ortnit* do not seem originally to have been among the legends surrounding Theodoric the Great, the Dietrich von Bern cycle, Wolfdietrich became identified as the grandfather of Dietrich, and material from the two stories found its way into a number of Dietrich tales, including the Old Norse Thidreksaga.

The story survives in four versions. Three of these (A,B,C) are largely independent of each other, and each gives Wolfdietrich a different birthplace. The fourth, D, is a compilation of material from versions B and C.

Wolfdietrich A ("Wolfdietrich of Constantinople") is the oldest version, written around 1230, though only surviving in a much later manuscript, the Ambraser Heldenbuch (MS A). The first 505 strophes (A1) are probably written by the same author as the version of Ortnit which precedes it in the manuscript, but the remaining 101 strophes (A2) show a more condensed narration by a continuator using material from the tradition of Wolfdietrich B. The end of the story is missing in the Ambraser Heldenbuch (it ends as Wolfdieterich's sword breaks in his fight against the dragon), but can be reconstructed from the Dresden Heldenbuch of 1472, which draws on the same source as MS A.

Wolfdietrich B ("Wolfdietrich of Saloniki") greatly expands the story of Wolfdietrich's youth.

Wolfdietrich C ("Wolfdietrich of Athens") survives only in five widely spread fragments, one of which is now missing.

Wolfdietrich D is the most extensive version (hence "The Large Wolfdietrich") and combines material from versions B and C as well as a further, unknown version related to B. With 10 manuscripts and six printed editions it is "one of the great literary successes of the late Middle Ages".

Ortnit A

King Ortnit of Lambarten (Lombardy) abducts Liebgarte, the daughter of King Machorel. Under the guise of an attempt at reconciliation, Machorel sends Ortnit two dragon eggs, and the dragons terrorise the kingdom after they hatch. After a year Ortnit sets out to defeat the dragons, but is caught asleep and killed by them. His widow is forced into seclusion, to await the birth of Ortnit's avenger.

Wolfdietrich A

Wolfdietrich is born as third son to Hugdietrich, King of Greece. The king's evil counsellor Sabene persuades him that the child is the spawn of the devil, and Duke Berchtung of Meran is ordered to kill him. But Berchtung saves the child and brings about the banishment of Sabene.

After Hugdietrich's death, Sabene returns to Constantinople and persuades the two elder brothers to banish the queen and deprive Wolfdietrich, now living in Berchtung's castle Lilienport, of his inheritance. Wolfdietrich leads a military campaign against his brothers but it fails and he is besieged in Lilienport. After four years he breaks out and makes his way to seek help from King Ortnit.

He eventually makes his way to Garte, where he finds Ortnit's widow lamenting her husband's death. He defeats the dragons, marries Liebgart, and becomes King of Lambarten.

Disguised as a pilgrim, Wolfdietrich reconnoitres Constantinople, where Berchtung's sons are being held captive by his brothers. After recovering his wife, who had been abducted in the meantime, he sails to Greece, where after a successful siege of his brothers he has Sabene executed and rewards his faithful vassals. He then returns to Lambarten.

After twelve years of marriage, Wolfdietrich moves to a monastery, where devils torment him until his death.

Various theories have attempted to connect Wolfdietrich (and his father Hugdietrich) with historical persons from the Germanic Migration Period:

- The Ostrogothic theory equates Wolfdietrich with Dietrich von Bern. This is supported by the name Dietrich (Wolfdietrich is a nickname for the child baptized Dietrich), by the Italian and Near East geography, and by the exile and reconquest story. However, given the prominence of the other Dietrich stories, this seems unlikely.

- The Frankish theories identify Wolfdietrich with various Merovingian rulers, Theudebert, Theuderich or Gundoald. Support for this lies in the motif of the conflict between the brothers over the inheritance, and the name Hugdietrich is Frankish. The closest parallels are with Chlodwig I (=Hugdietrich) and his son Theuderich (=Wolfdietrich): the accusation of bastardy, fraternal conflict and a mixed marriage. The conception of Berchtung may be based on Hildebrand, loyal follower of Dietrich von Bern, but also allude to the Frankish ruler type Majordomus.According to Joachim Heinzle, the Wolfdietrich tradition has to be considered as "an independent saga, whose origins are not to be found in Gothic but Frankish history." Elisabeth Lienert regards approaches to recognize the hero Wolfdietrich as saga equivalent to Theodoric the Great as a long obsolete thesis. Roswitha Wisniewski assumes that "the Wolfdietrich apparently points to a very old version of the Dietrichsage, which, however, had to give way to the younger saga versions of the Middle High German epics."

However, there is no consensus on these theories, and it can be argued that the many anti-historical elements essential to the story (rescue by wolves, magic armour, giants, dragons) suggest it combines a variety of legendary and fantastic sources divorced from any specific historical personalities. In this view *Wolfdietrich* is essentially a montage, which draws on not only the heroic epic, but also the chanson de geste, crusade literature, the bride-quest story, and other sources, with what Miklautsch calls a "hybrid hero".

Wolfdietrich and *Ortnit* are written in a strophic form called the *Hildebrandston* (similar to the Nibelungenstrophe used in the Nibelungenlied and Kudrun). It consists of four long-lines: each long-line has three feet with a feminine ending, a caesura, then three feet with a rhymed masculine ending.

Wolfdietrich A

In Constantinople in Greece there ruled a mighty king - 1. Auf Kunstenobl ze Kriechen || ein gewaltiger kuanig sass
In virtue or honour or manliness he was not left warning - an dem tugent noch ere || noch manheite nie vergass
By his lord and creator, who gave him these qualities - sein maister und sein schepfer || der in da werden liess
He was lacking in nothing except that was a heathn - an im geprast nicht mere || wann daz er ein hayden hiess.

The strophes are marked in the manuscripts by a Lombardic capital.

In the printed Heldenbücher, the *Hildebrandston* is transformed into the *Heunenweise*, an eight-line strophe: the long-line is split at the caesura and unrhymed line-endings are given rhymes, with the resulting rhyme scheme ABABCDCD. This necessarily involved considerable rewriting of the text:

Wolfdietrich D, Strassburger Heldenbuch, 1479
In Constantinople it is true - 6. Zuo constantinopel für ware
There ruled a wealthy king - da saß ein künig reich
He was mighty indeed - er was gewaltig zware
His name was Hugdieterich - der hieß Hugdietereich
From his earliest youth - auff von kindes jugent
The king lead a good life - kund der künig wol leben
Through God and his own virtue - durh got und durch sein tugent
Both giving and receiving - beide lihen und auch geben

The four versions of *Wolfdietrich* survive in 11 complete manuscripts and several fragments of a twelfth. In many cases *Wolfdietrich* (and *Ortnit*) form part of a larger collection under the title of *Heldenbuch* ("Book of Heroes").

Wolfdietrich A

- MS A, the Ambraser Heldenbuch (Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. Ser. nova 2663), written 1507–1516 by Hans Ried—contains *Ortnit* and 606 strophes of *Wolfdietrich*

- MS k, the Dresden Heldenbuch (Dresden, State Library, Mscr. M 201), dated 1472, written by Kaspar von der Roen

- MS W (Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. 2779), early 14th century, contains only *Ortnit* in the same version as A and k. However, *Ornit* was originally followed by a number of blank pages, which may originally have been meant for *Wolfdietrich*.

Wolfdietrich B

- MS B (Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. 2947), late 15th century

- MS H (Berlin, State Library, mgq 761), second half of 15th century

- MS K (Heidelberg, University Library, Cpg 109), written 1516–1527
The MSS of *Wolfdietrich B* do not include *Ortnit*.

Wolfdietrich C

The Berlin-Wolfenbüttel Heldenbuch, written in the first half of 14th century, preserved in five fragments ranging from a single sheet to two folios, though two of the fragments are now missing.

Wolfdietrich D

Ten manuscripts from the late 15th and early 16th centuries, including

- MS c, the Strassburg Heldenbuch of Diebolt von Hanow

- MS d, the Johanniter Heldenbuch

- MS y, Lienhart Scheubels Heldenbuch, 1480–1490

In 1479 Johann Prüss printed a Heldenbuch which included *Ornit*, *Wolfdietrich* and three other works, with 230 woodcuts. The text came primarily from the source used in the Heldenbuch of Diebolt von Hanow (MS c). It was subsequently reprinted, with variations and different woodcuts, by others in 1491, 1509, 1545, 1560 and 1590.

The Strassburg Heldenbuch was used as the source for a dramatic trilogy by Jakob Ayrer published in 1618:

- *Vom HuegDieterichen / und seinem Sohn WolffDieterichen / König in Griechenland*

- *Vom dem Keiser Ottnit*

- *Von WolffDieterichen / dem König aus Griechenland*

Biterolf und Dietleib

Biterolf und Dietleib (Biterolf and Dietlieb) is an anonymous Middle High German heroic poem concerning the heroes Biterolf of Toledo and his son Dietleib of Styria. It tells the tale of Biterolf and Dietleib's service at the court of Etzel, king of the Huns, in the course of which the heroes defeat Etzel's enemies, including an extended war/tournament against the Burgundian heroes of the *Nibelungenlied*. As a reward for their services, Dietleib and Biterolf receive the March of Styria as a fief. The text is characterized by its comedic parody of the traditions of heroic epic.

Biterolf und Dietleib is only attested in the Ambraser Heldenbuch (1504-1516), but it may have been composed in the thirteenth century. The poem is sometimes considered part of the cycle of legends about Dietrich von Bern: it is then either considered part of the so-called "historical" Dietrich poems, or else placed together in its own subgroup of Dietrich poems together with the *Rosengarten zu Worms*. More often, it is considered to be independent from the Dietrich cycle.

Biterolf, the king of Toledo in Spain, hears of the grandeur of Etzel's court in Hungary, and decides to set out with twelve men to join that court, leaving Spain in secret. Near Paris he encounters Walther of Aquitaine, who had been a hostage of the Huns as a youth. At first, the two heroes fight, but soon they realize that Biterolf is the Walther's uncle. Walther then tells Biterolf of his experiences at Etzel's court. Biterolf continues his journey, but is forced repeatedly to fight against the lords through whose territory he travels, who demand a toll for him to pass through. He is, however, welcomed in Bechelarn by Etzel's margrave Rüdiger. Etzel is also welcoming and offers Biterolf gifts, but Biterolf refuses and also does not identify himself. Sometime later both Biterolf and Rüdiger fight a battle for the city of Gamaly, which belongs to the King of Prussia. Both heroes are captured, but Biterolf escapes and captures the lord of the castle where they are imprisoned, sends word to Etzel, and then conquers the city with an army and frees the other prisoners.

Some years later Biterolf's son Dietleib discovers his father's weapons and decides to set out in secret to find his father. Like his father, he is frequently attacked along the way, especially in Worms, where Hagen, Gernot, and Gunther attack him. He wounds all his opponents, however, who are amazed by skill at fighting given his youth. When he finally arrives at Etzel's court, Etzel's wife

Helche takes him under her wing. Biterolf and Dietleib do not recognize each other, however. The heroes are soon called to battle, but Dietleib is told to stay behind due to his youth. He decides to secretly join the army however, and everyone is amazed at his prowess in battle. In the heat of the battle, he mistakes Biterolf for an enemy and they fight until Rüdiger separates the two. After the battle Rüdiger takes Biterolf aside and speaks to him, revealing that he has recognized Biterolf and Dietleib's identities, and the father and son are thus reunited. Biterolf had forced Rüdiger to promise not to reveal their identities to man or woman, but Rüdiger spreads the rumor throughout the court by telling a girl (neither man nor woman), who informs Etzel. Biterolf and Etzel then recognize each other as kings.

Dietleib now complains to Etzel about the attacks he endured from the Burgundians at Worms. Etzel calls together his army to avenge this dishonor and invades the Burgundians' kingdom, with the help of heroes such as Dietrich von Bern and others from Lombardy, Styria, Hungary, Austria, Poland, and Turkey. Upon receiving the declaration of war, Gunther calls together his own vassals from Saxony, Thuringia, Bohemia, Bavaria, Swabia, Lorrain, and the Netherlands. Etzel's army camps outside of Worms. Rüdiger then goes as a messenger to the Burgundians and the various heroes are introduced to each other and their intentions made clear. As his reward for being the messenger, Rüdiger is allowed to kiss all the ladies at the Burgundian court, and Brünhild gives Rüdiger a lance with a flag that he should carry into combat as a sign of his love for the ladies. The ladies of Worms also demand to choose the manner in which the heroes of the two armies should fight: either in a battle or in individual duals.

Rüdiger brings this message back to the Hunnish camp, where Hildebrand begins to organize the army for a large battle. Dietrich von Bern learns that he will be fighting against the troop led by Siegfried and becomes fearful due to the many stories about this hero. Hildebrand is forced to cajole Dietrich into fighting, even fighting against him, until Dietrich is furious and ready to fight. Dietrich's vassal Wolfhart, meanwhile, laments that the Burgundians are well known for their jousts, whereas he knows little about this as he's only ever fought in wars. He wishes he had time to learn this form of entertainment while he's at Worms. Rüdiger therefore negotiates with the Burgundians to have a tournament rather than a battle, with the ladies of Worms as the audience. In the course of the tournament, however, several of the heroes on the Hunnish side are captured, including Wolfhart, and a change in the rules is negotiates so that Dietrich and his men can free them. This causes the tournament to turn into a real battle in which many are killed and wounded until night fall forces the fighting to end.

On the next day the battle begins as Hildebrand had planned it. The poet introduces the different troops that will fight as well as the various messengers and couriers traveling between them who will make sure that relatives on different sides avoid each other in battle. The battle lasts all day, with its climax being Dietrich's vassal Heime's decision to leave his troop to attack Siegfried. Siegfried, however, knocks Heime's famous sword Nagelring out of his hand, so that now the entire battle concerns the various armies fighting to recover the sword. Hildebrand finally recovers the weapon as darkness falls and the battle must be paused once more.

On the next day, it is decided to grant the armies a day of rest while only 86 of their leaders from each side fight. The two groups of 86 fight an evenly matched battle until Rüdiger succeeds in bringing his banner to the gates of Worms. He strikes a splinter from the wooden gate with his sword, and the ladies of Worms demand an end to the battle, to which the exhausted men agree. Gunther recognizes Dietleib as the greatest of warriors and invites the strangers into his court, where all are reconciled through various courtly festivities. Brünhild explains that she gave Rüdiger the flag in order to see the heroes demonstrate their abilities rather than in hopes of seeing the men kill each other. The various armies and their leaders then return home, and Heime is given back his sword. When Biterolf and Dietleib return to Etzel's court, Etzel grants Biterolf the March of Styria as a hereditary fief as a reward for his service. Biterolf then founds the city of Traismauer and resettles the people of Toledo there, where they found a new dynasty.

Biterolf und Dietleib is typically dated to the middle of the thirteenth century. It is only transmitted in one manuscript, the Ambraser Heldenbuch. The poem's language shows typical elements of Styrian and Austrian dialects, indicating, like its content, that it was likely composed there. The battle for the city of "Gamaly" in Prussia may reflect the two Prussian crusades undertaken by Ottokar II of Bohemia, who ruled Styria around that time. Alternatively, its possible that the enfeoffment of Biterolf as lord of Styria and the resettlement of the Toledans refers to Rudolf von Habsburg's enfeoffment of his son with Styria in 1282, as well as the attempt by Alfonso X of Castile to claim the imperial throne instead of Rudolf. Elisabeth Lienert finds these various attempts to connect the poem to historical events unconvincing.

Like almost all German heroic poems, it is anonymous. The second half of the *Biterolf* is closely related to *Rosengarten zu Worms*, a poem in the Dietrich cycle that similarly features battles between heroes of the Dietrich cycle and the Burgundians. The *Biterolf* even shares expressions and formulations with the *Rosengarten*, and it is most likely that the author of the *Biterolf* knew the *Rosengarten* and used it for his own composition. The poem shows some similarities to the fragmentary *Dietrich und Wenezlan* as well, as both contain a campaign against Poland.

Unlike most German heroic epics, the *Biterolf* is written in rhyming couplets rather than stanzas: this may indicate an attempt to allude to the genre of courtly romance, which was typically written in this form. Like the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Biterolf* is divided into chapters called *âventiuren* in the manuscript. The poem may have been influenced by Wirnt von Gravenberg's Arthurian romance *Wigalois*.

Although both Biterolf and Dietleib existed in the heroic tradition prior to composition of this poem, they do not appear to have had any particular story attached to them. Victor Millet suggests that it is therefore possible that the author of the *Biterolf* selected them as two heroes with whom he could write any story he wished. The story may have been composed as a way of explaining Dietleib's description, already found in other poems, as *von Stîre* (of Styria), as well as playing the role of making Dietelib into a local hero for the Styrians. The poem, moreover, presents a fictional beginning of the creation of Styria as a polity: Dietleib appears as the founding hero of Styria.

Biterolf and Dietleib's move to the court of Etzel is very similar to the magnetic power exercised on other knights and kings by the court of King Arthur in the romance tradition. Elisabeth Lienert explicitly compares Biterolf to Gahmuret from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* as he travels east to Etzel, while comparing Dietleib to Parzival himself in his quest to seek his father. At the same time, the story seems to cite traditions also found in texts such as *König Rother* when Biterolf gives himself an alias at Etzel's court. The story also represents a reversal of the story of Walter of Aquitaine: whereas Walter fled the Huns, Biterolf and Dietleib, his kinsmen, are both drawn to them. The battles fought by Dietleib against the Burgundians on his way to Etzel represent another citation of this tradition. Unlike in the Walter saga, however, no one is killed or wounded by these battles. The battle found by Biterolf against his son Dietleib is similarly reminiscent of the conflict in the *Hildebrandslied* and *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied*. The battles at Worms are similarly full of allusions to or reversals of other heroic epics: Wolfhart, who is normally a hot-head, is shown to desire a courtly tournament, Rüdiger fulfills the role of messenger to the Burgundians just as in the *Nibelungenlied*, and Dietrich is shown to be afraid to fight, as in many poems. The battles, similarly, contain almost every known hero from German heroic tradition. Lastly, the Huns and Burgundians reverse their roles from the end of the *Nibelungenlied* as the Huns go to Worms. Elisabeth Lienert notes that these various citations and reversals mean that *Biterolf und Dietleib* is less a poem in the heroic tradition than a poem about the heroic tradition, with the *Biterolf* functioning as a sum of the heroic world as well as a parody of it. She characterizes the poem as using techniques of "montage" for a "literary game" ("literarisches Spiel") with the public's foreknowledge of the heroic tradition.

Werner Hoffmann notes that the *Biterolf* appears to be set before any of the large conflicts of the *Nibelungenlied* or the historical Dietrich poems: there is no enmity between Brünhild and Kriemhild, Ermenrich supports Dietrich, the hostile Saxon kings from the *Nibelungenlied* support the Burgundians, etc. Hoffmann suggests that the work presents a sort of utopian vision of the time before these great conflicts and battles, in which reconciliation and recompense are possible. The poet also contrasts this utopian world critically with his own present. Lienert nevertheless notes that the poem is full of foreshadowing of the future catastrophes for an audience which knew the heroic material: the poem is both a prehistory of the *Nibelungenlied* and Dietrich cycle, but it is also a less destructive alternative to the events in those texts. The poem is also characterized by its at times ironic tone and critical distance to the story, which allows the narrative to play with elements of the heroic tradition. Victor Millet also notes that the poem's descriptions are unusually realistic, as is its geography. The text likely provided many potential points of identification for an Austrian audience at the end of the thirteenth century. The text underlines the importance of kinship by expanding the role of kinship relations and their role in preventing conflict and effecting reconciliation.

Jüngeres Hildebranslied

The ***Jüngeres Hildebrandslied*** (the younger lay of Hildebrand) or ***Das Lied von dem alten Hildebrand*** (the song of old Hildebrand) is an anonymous Early New High German heroic ballad, first attested in the fifteenth century. A late attestation of Germanic heroic legend, the ballad features the same basic story as the much older *Hildebrandslied*, but was composed without knowledge of that text. Rather, it reworks the oral legend of the warrior Hildebrand and his fight against his son (here Alebrand) in accordance with late medieval and early modern taste. It is highly sentimentalized and focuses on Hildebrand's return home rather than the tragic conflict of the older tradition.

The *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* was an extremely popular ballad in the age of print, and continued to be reprinted into the eighteenth century. Its melody was well known and the poem has given its name to its metrical form, the so-called "Hildebrandston". The *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* was translated into Dutch, Yiddish, and Danish several times. In the nineteenth century it was collected as a traditional piece of German folk poetry by the editors of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Together with another heroic ballad, *Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid*, it represents the longest lasting element of the heroic tradition in Germany that remained popular outside of learned circles.

Hildebrand says that he wants to ride to Bern (Verona), in order to see his wife Ute. A knight warns him that if he goes there he will have to fight against Alebrand, but Hildebrand believes he will defeat Alebrand easily. Dietrich von Bern asks him not to go, because Dietrich greatly values the young Alebrand, but Hildebrand goes anyway. As Hildebrand is riding by the Veronan rose garden, a young warrior appears, insults Hildebrand by calling him old, asks him what he is doing in his father's country, and advises him to turn back. Hildebrand laughs and tells him that he has had to fight and ride his whole life in order to return home. This is why his beard is so white. Alebrand declares that he will rip out Hildebrand's beard; the old warrior should give him his weapons if he wants to live. Hildebrand warns Alebrand that he will defend himself, and both draw their swords. Alebrand is able to strike a blow on Hildebrand, and Hildebrand jumps back in shock. He declares that a woman must have taught Alebrand to fight that way. Alebrand denies this and Hildebrand attacks more vigorously, throwing Alebrand to the ground. He demands that Alebrand identify himself, declaring that if he does not belong to the family of the Wolfings (that is, Hildebrand's family), he will slay him. Alebrand claims not to know this family, but identifies his mother as Ute and his father as Hildebrand. Hildebrand now says that if Alebrand's mother is Ute, then he is his father. He kisses his son, and the two reconcile. Alebrands regrets having given his father wounds. Alebrand now brings Hildebrand home and has him sit at the place of honor at the family table. Ute, however, believes that Hildebrand is Alebrand's prisoner and asks why he has placed him there. Alebrand reveals Hildebrand's identity, and Ute pours him wine and welcomes him.

The textual form of the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* is a product of the fifteenth century, though its material is clearly much older (see below). It is transmitted in five manuscripts, beginning with a fragment from 1459, with the first complete version found in the Dresdener Heldenbuch. The poem was printed numerous times beginning in the sixteenth century, and continued to be printed into the eighteenth century. The ballad even ended up in the collection of German folk poetry known as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805). The poem and the melody to which it was sung were both extremely well known throughout this period.

The author of the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* obviously did not know the text of the 800s *Hildebrandslied*; the ballad is rather the result of a long oral tradition that was only written down in the fifteenth century. It is generally assumed that in the original form of the story, Hildebrand kills his son, an assumption that a few verses in eddic meter in the Old Norse *Ásmundar saga kappabana* appear to support. It is possible that a version of the story with a tragic and a happy ending coexisted for a time in thirteenth-century Germany, however the version of Hildebrand's battle with his son found in the Old Norse Thidreksaga (c. 1250), based on Low German sources, already includes the survival of both father and son. The name of Hildebrand's son in the Thidrekssaga matches that found in the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* ("Alebrand"), as opposed to the Old High German form "Hadubrand". In the Norse text as in the Younger Lay, moreover, Hildebrand accuses his son of having been taught to fight by a woman after receiving a powerful blow with a sword—these aspects of presumably oral story-telling were thus relatively stable over time.

The *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* is composed in a stanza form known as the "Hildebrandston," so named because the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* was the most famous poem to use this metrical form throughout the early modern period, where songs were often marked "im Thon: Wie man den alten Hildenbrandt singt" (in the melody that one uses to sing the old Hildebrand). The stanza consists of four "Langzeilen," lines consisting of three metrical feet, a caesura, and three additional metrical feet. Unlike the similar stanza used in the *Nibelungenlied*, in the "Hildebrandston" all four lines are of the same length. An example is the following stanza (taken from John Meier's edition):

"Ich wil zu Land ausreiten", || sprach sich Meister Hiltebrant, a
"Der mir die Weg tet weisen || gen Bern wol in die Land, a
Die seind mir unkund gewesen || vil manchen lieben Tag: b
In zwei und dreißig jaren || Fraw Utten ich nie gesach." b

Some versions of the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* use a modified version of the "Hildebrandston" known as the "Heunenweise" or "Hunnenweise" (the Hunnish melody), in which there are always rhymes (or near rhymes) at the mid-line caesura. The stanza can then be reinterpreted as consisting of eight short lines with alternating rhyme rather than four "Langzeilen." An example of this form is the version of the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* that found its way into *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*:

"Ich will zu Land ausreiten," a
Sprach Meister Hildebrandt, b
"Wer wird die Weg mir weisen a
"Gen Bern wohl in das Land? b
"Unkund sind sie geworden c
Mir manchen lieben Tag, d
In zwey und dreyßig Jahren c
Frau Utten ich nicht sah." d

Ermenrichs Tod

Ermenrichs Tod or ***Koninc Ermenrîkes Dôt*** (transl. the death of king Ermenrich) is an anonymous Middle Low German heroic ballad from the middle of the sixteenth century. It is a late attestation of Germanic heroic legend.

The ballad, which is printed in a highly garbled form, tells the story of how Ermenrich is killed by Dietrich von Bern and several other heroes. The poem shows numerous similarities to older stories about Ermenrich attested in early medieval and Old Norse sources.

According to the song, Dietrich wants to exile the King of the Franks, *van Armentriken*, because the latter wants to hang Dietrich. As one of his companions Dietrich receives the gigantic King Blödelinck, who is only twelve years old and is the son of a Frankish widow. Dietrich then sets off to *Freysack* where the enemy king lives, passing by a set of gallows. He and his companions disguise themselves as dancers and receive an audience with the king before revealing themselves and demanding to know why the king wants to hang Dietrich. When the king is silent, Dietrich cuts off his head and then the twelve proceed to kill everyone in the castle except for Reinholt von Meilan, who is spared due to his loyalty to the king. Blödelinck has disappeared in the fighting and Dietrich assumes he is dead, but the giant reappears.

The ballad was originally printed as a broadside titled ***Van Dirick van dem Berne*** (concerning Dietrich von Bern) in 1535/45 or 1560 together with another ballad *Juncker Baltzer* in Lübeck, and was printed again in a Low German songbook from 1590 or 1600. The broadside is heavily corrupted—possibly the work of a printer famous for his mistakes, Johannes Balhorn the Elder—and not always comprehensible. Victor Millet suggests that it was printed in honor of King Christian II of Denmark, who returned from exile in the Netherlands at this time. Elisabeth Lienert finds this interpretation questionable, however notes that *Juncker Baltzer*, the text printed alongside *Ermenrichs Tod*, is clearly about Christian.

The ballad is printed in the so-called "Hildebrandston," a stanzaic metrical form named about another heroic ballad, the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied*. No melody has been transmitted with the text, but it was likely meant to be sung. The stanza consists of four "Langzeilen," lines consisting of three metrical feet, a caesura, and three additional metrical feet. Unlike the similar stanza used in the *Nibelungenlied*, in the "Hildebrandston" all four lines are of the same length. The lines rhyme in couplets, with occasional rhymes across lines at the caesura.[7] An example is the first stanza of the poem as contained in the first printed edition:

So vern yn yennen Franckriken/ || dar waenth eyn to koeinck ys wolgemeit. a
Den wil de Berner vordriuen/ || vmme syner froelicheit. a
He voert yn synem rike/ || Steede/ Boerge vnd egen landt. b
Tho weem schal ick my holden/ || gyff radt Meister Hillebrandt. b

Although the text is very late and at times not clear, it nevertheless contains many references to events in the oral tradition about Ermenrich that are otherwise only found in allusions or Scandinavian sources. Lienert notes that it is possible that the ballad comes from a tradition in which Dietrich successfully returns from exile and avenges himself on his wicked uncle. Joachim Heinzle suspects that many of the mistakes come from the composer of the ballad only partially remembering the heroic tradition. *Van Armentriken* is clearly the legendary Ermenrich, with his name misunderstood as the name of his country. His misidentification as King of the Franks/France may be connected to a note by Johannes Agricola in which a king *Ermentfrid* (that is, Ermenrich) of the Franks supposedly conquered Lombardy and there killed his nephews known as the Harlungen. Blödelinck is Blödel, i.e. Bleda, Attila's brother, who also appears in the Nibelungenlied and the historical Dietrich poems. *Freysack* is probably Breisach, which was connected with the Harlungen from an early date. Lastly, Ermenrich's death is reminiscent of the Svanhild episode recorded in the Poetic Edda and other sources, as the sons of Jónakr also pass by a set of gallows on their way to confront Jörmunrekkr. Dietrich's involvement may be a variant of his return from exile – in a variant of the text, it is even said that Ermenrich wanted to drive Dietrich away, not the other way around. Despite the many apparent connections to the oral tradition, Millet believes that it is useless to use *Ermenrichs Tod* to reconstruct legends about Ermenrich.

Heldenbuch

Heldenbücher (singular *Heldenbuch* "book of heroes") is the conventional title under which a group of German manuscripts and prints of the 15th and 16th centuries has come down to us. Each *Heldenbuch* contains a collection of primarily epic poetry, typically including material from the Theodoric cycle, and the cycle of Hugdietrich, Wolfdietrich and Ortnit. The *Heldenbuch* texts are thus based on medieval German literature, but adapted to the tastes of the Renaissance.

The earliest surviving Heldenbuch is a parchment manuscript dating from the first half of the 14th century, which survived only in five fragments (two are now missing). It is variously referred to as the **Rheinfränkisches Heldenbuch** ("Rhine Franconian Heldenbuch") from its dialect or the *Berlin-Wolfenbüttel Heldenbuch* from the location of two of the fragments, and preserves parts of the Eckenlied (E3), Virginal (V3), Ortnit (C) and Wolfdietrich (C), though the fragments do not give any indication of the original order. The large format and luxurious quality of the manuscript indicate the status of the heroic epic in the 14th century.

After this, four complete Heldenbuch manuscripts are known:

The **Dresden Heldenbuch** of Kaspar von der Rhön (Saxon State and University Library Dresden, Mscr.Dresd.M.201) dates from 1472. Written in an East Franconian dialect, probably in Nuremberg, it was compiled by Kaspar and written by him and another unnamed scribe, it includes Ortnit (k), Wolfdietrich (k), Eckenlied (E3), Rosengarten zu Worms, Meerwunder, Sigenot, Der Wunderer, Herzog Ernst, Laurin, Virginal (V11) and the Jüngeres Hildebrandslied. It therefore includes all the "fantastic" Dietrich epics apart from Goldemar. Each poem is preceded by a full-page illustration. Many of the poems have been deliberately shortened, sometime drastically, by the scribes in order to make them short enough to be read in a single sitting, as they explicitly remark. The manuscript, previously in private hands, was purchased by the Electoral Library of Saxony (precursor of the current State Library), in 1793. Already showing considerable damage by the start of the 20th century, during the Second World War, the manuscript was stored in a bomb-proof vault, but it suffered extensive water damage in the aftermath of the allied bombing in February 1945. This severely damaged the illustrations and made some pages impossible to read. However, four transcriptions made in the 18th and 19th centuries provide assistance with reading the text.

- The **Johanniter-Heldenbuch** dates from 1476. It was lost in the bombardment of the municipal library (located in the Temple Neuf) by German artillery during the August 1870 Siege of Strassburg, but the contents are known from earlier transcriptions. It contained Wolfdietrich (D), Rosengarten zu Worms, Salman und Morolf and Ortnit (D). It was first recorded in Johann Jakob Witter's 1746 catalogue of the library of the Order of St John (German *Johanniter*) in Strasbourg, by which time the codex had been unbound and reassembled, putting the texts in a different order from other Heldenbücher.

- The **Strassburg Heldenbuch** of Diebolt von Hanowe from around 1480 was also lost in the Siege of Strassburg — it, too, was stored in the Temple Neuf — and is likewise known only from transcriptions. It contained Ortnit (D), Wolfdietrich (D), Rosengarten zu Worms, Laurin, Sigenot, der Stricker's Pfaffe Amis, Salomon und Markolf and *Die undankbare Wiedererweckte*. The manuscript text is based on a lost Heldenbuch manuscript which also served as the source for the earliest printed Heldenbuch of 1479. In addition to the poems, both the codex and printed book contain a prose essay, now called the *Heldenbuch-Prosa* ("Heldenbuch Prose"), which provides a "history" of all the heroes in the Nibelungenlied and Dietrich cycles. In the manuscript it forms the introduction, in the print version, an appendix.

- Lienhart Scheubels Heldenbuch, (Austrian National Library, Cod. 15478), named after its first owner, was written in an Austro-Bavarian dialect. It was compiled in sections, which may initially have circulated separately, with the earliest parts written around 1480 and the last around 1490. It contains Virginal (V12), *Antelan*, *Ortnit* (D), *Wolfdietrich* (D), the Nibelungenlied and Lorengel. It was discovered in 1856 by Julius Feifalik in the Piarist College of St Joseph in Vienna, and for this reason it is also sometimes referred to as the *Wiener Piaristenhandschrift*.

The **Ambraser Heldenbuch**, in spite of the name, is not a Heldenbuch in the same sense as these manuscripts, since only one third of its contents belong to the genre of heroic verse — the remainder are courtly and didactic works from the 13th century.[3] However, the table of contents at the front of the codex has the heading "Tabula des Heldenpuechs". Within the heroic genre, it goes beyond the others in offering the complete Nibelungen cycle: the Nibelungenlied, the Nibelungenklage and Kudrun. From the Dietrich cycle it includes Dietrichs Flucht, Rabenschlacht, Biterolf und Dietleib, *Ortnit* (A) and *Wolfdietrich* (A). The manuscript was commissioned sometime before 1504 by the Emperor Maximilian I and completed in 1517. It is a luxurious codex — almost 500 large-format pages with three columns of text, decorated with Lombardic capitals and many marginal illustrations — and it provides evidence of the continuing interest of this material to an aristocratic readership into the 16th century.
Two fragments of a 15th century manuscript of *Virginal* (V7) in the monastery library at Ebstorf in Lower Saxony and the Hessen State Archives in Marburg, together with a fragment of *Rosengarten* (R8) in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, may represent the remains of another Heldenbuch. The language is Bavarian, and the manuscript probably of Austrian origin. William II, Landgrave of Hesse has been suggested as a possible owner. The manuscript was cut up by 1564 at the latest.

A potential further Heldenbuch is the **Heldenbuch an der Etsch** ("Heldenbuch on the River Adige"). This phrase appears in a 1502 notebook entry by Maximilian I and has long been taken to refer to a lost source of the heroic poems in the Ambraser Heldenbuch. However, there are uncertainties over the interpretation of Maximilian's words and no firm conclusion can be reached on the existence of this supposed codex.

The first printed Heldenbuch dates to 1479, bearing the title *der helden buch/das nennet den wolfdieterich*, putting its main focus on Wolfdietrich, whom it makes an ancestor of Dietrich's. Later printed *Heldenbücher* appeared in Augsburg 1491, Hagenau 1509, Augsburg 1545, Frankfurt 1560 and Frankfurt 1590.

Along with the poems, the Strassburg Heldenbuch of Diebolt von Hanow included an introductory essay, now called the "Heldenbuch-Prosa" ("Heldenbuch Prose"), which was copied by all the later printed editions, either as a preface or as an afterword. The "Heldenbuch-Prosa" is also transmitted in a printed book of *Sigenot*, *Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid*, and *Laurin* (Lübeck, 1560), and excerpts are printed in a printing of *Laurin* (Nuremberg, 1555). It presents "a brief survey in prose form of the most important figures and events of German medieval heroic poetry". The Heldenbuch-Prosa offers an all-encompassing depiction of the entire heroic age, partially in the form of a narrative, partially in the form of a catalog of names. It is structured both genealogically and geographically, dividing the heroes into those from around Aachen and Cologne, those from Hunland, and those from Worms. The compiler's use of prose may indicate a claim for the historical veracity of the account.

> *The piece starts with the "first hero," Orendel von Trier, and his adventures, before listing the most important lands in which the heroes lived.*
>
> *It then explains the genesis of the heroes: in the beginning, God created the dwarves with the knowledge of minerals; he then created the giants to protect the dwarves from dragons and other monsters, but the giants later became evil, so he created the heroes, brave and strong, to defend the dwarves against both the giants and the dragons. The heroes also honoured and helped women, protecting widows and orphans. None of the heroes were peasants, and all lords and nobles are descended from them.*
>
> *Now follows a list of famous heroes, briefly characterised, and a long section outlining the stories of Ortnit, Hugdietreich and Wolfdietrich. It then describes the descent from Wolfdietrich of Dietrich von Bern, telling how the spirit of Mohammed came to his mother when she was pregnant and foretold her son's greatness.*
>
> *Some figures from the Nibelungenlied are introduced as heroes from the Rhineland and Lower Rhine, which links to the next section devoted to the heroes of Hungary (Hunland) centred around King Etzel, and then to a long passage about Dietrich von Bern. According to the text, Dietrich is the grandson of Wolfdietrich and son of Dietmar. During her pregnancy, Dietrich's mother was visited by the demon Machmet (i.e. Mohammed imagined as a Muslim god), who prophesies that Dietrich will be the strongest spirit who ever lived and will breathe fire when angry. The devil (Machmet?) then builds Verona/Bern in three days. Ermenrich, here imagined as Dietrich's brother rather than his uncle, rapes his marshal Sibiche's wife, whereupon Sibiche decides to advise Ermenrich in such a way as to ensure his lord's destruction. Thus he advises Ermenrich to hang his own nephews, the Harlungen. Their guardian, Eckehart of Breisach, informs Dietrich, and Dietrich declares war on Ermenrich. Ermenrich, however, captures Dietrich's best men, and to ransom them, Dietrich goes into exile. He ends up at Etzel's court, who gives Dietrich a large army that reconquers Verona. However, once Dietrich had fought at the rose garden against Siegfried, slaying him.*
>
> *The piece closes with the demise of the heroes, beginning with the marriage of Etzel and Kriemhilt: according to Heldenbuch-Prosa, Kriemhilt organized her wedding as revenge for Dietrich having killed Siegfried in a rose garden. This leads to deaths of the Burgundians and many other warriors at Etzel's court, leaving only Dietrich and Hildebrand alive. They are then involved in a battle against Günther at Bern, which only Dietrich survived. Told by a dwarf that "your kingdom is no longer of this world", he disappears for ever. The only remaining hero is Eckehart, who, having visited the Venusberg, will continue to live until the day of judgment and warns others not to go there*

The Heldenbuch-Prosa assembles an enormous amount of material in a somewhat haphazard fashion to explain the world of the heroic poems. Some of the material in the "Heldenbuch-Prosa" is not to be found in the narratives in the book or in other surviving material; some has parallels in the Thidrekssaga, but the compiler cannot have been familiar with that text. This suggests that he was also drawing on oral traditions, as well as perhaps as on his own invention, in order to make coherent sense of the material. Although the Nibelungenlied is not included in the Strassburg Heldenbuch or its printed version (it *is* found in the Ambraser Heldenbuch and Lienhart Scheubel's Heldenbuch), the "Heldenbuch-Prosa" provides evidence of the persistence of an oral tradition in existence alongside a well-known written text.

The modern reception of the Heldenbücher starts in the 18th century. The Dresden Heldenbuch is first mentioned by Heinrich Goltlieb Titz and Johann David Köhler in 1714, and the manuscript was later owned by Johann Christoph Gottsched. Diebolt von Hanowe's Strassburg Heldenbuch is discussed in Johann Schilter's *Catalogue of German Authors* in 1728.

Although the above shows knowledge of manuscript *Heldenbücher* among some before 1800, the majority of discussions of the *Heldenbuch* focused on the printed version with *Ornit*, *Wolfdietrich*, *Laurin*, and the *Rosengarten zu Worms* before this point. The printed *Heldenbuch* continued to dominate discussions into the early nineteenth century. In 1796, Friedrich von Adelung published "Sieben Stücke aus dem Heldenbuch" ("Seven pieces from the Heldenbuch") in his *Nachrichten von altdeutschen Gedichten, welche aus der heidelbergischen Bibliothek in die vatikanische gekommen sind*. This publication was responsible for increased attention paid to manuscript *Heldenbücher* rather than the printed version. Ludwig Tieck examined original manuscripts and prints, in 1793 transcribing a Heldenbuch of 1577. In 1807 he announced his own Heldenbuch edition, though it never came to fruition. In 1811 Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, with whom Tieck at one point had planned to collaborate, published *Der Helden Buch*, with six works translated into Modern German, followed in 1820 and 1825 by the two-volume *Der Helden Buch in der Ursprache herausgegeben* ("The Heldenbuch published in the original language"), which includes the entire text of the Dresdener Heldenbuch. Von der Hagen attempted to expand the boundaries of the *Heldenbuch* to include all German heroic poetry besides the *Nibelungenlied* in his various editions. By the middle of the eighteenth century, most scholars limited the term to include the texts of the printed *Heldenbuch* and all the various poems in the cycle of Dietrich von Bern. This meaning of the term was then used by the editors of the *Deutsches Heldenbuch* (5 vols. 1866–1873).

Though the *Heldenbuch*'s influence on modern poetry is limited, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was familiar with it, having created a dramatic farce known as "The Romantic Poetry" in 1809, which featured various characters from the *Heldenbuch*, such as Ornit. The text features rewritings of passages of that poem as well, yet changes the ending so that Ornit defeats the dragons. Von der Hagen dedicated his 1811 edition to Goethe and sent him an example, which was well received. The story "The New Melusine" contained within *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* is clearly inspired by the *Heldenbuch-Prosa*. The nineteenth century also saw the poems of the *Heldenbuch* begin to play a role in poetological discourse: August Wilhelm Schlegel described these poems as a "heroic comedy" (*Heldenkomödie*) that could co-existed beside the "great tragedy" of the *Nibelungenlied* during a series of lectures held in 1802/03. In his *Aesthetics*, however, Friedrich Hegel described both the *Heldenbuch* and the *Nibelungenlied* as an example of the qualities an epic ought not to have.

Þiðreks saga

Þiðreks saga af Bern ('the saga of Þiðrekr of Bern', sometimes ***Thidrekssaga*** or ***Thidreks saga*** in English) is an Old Norse saga that collects almost all Germanic heroic legends known from Germany into a single narrative. At the center of this narrative is the biography of the hero Dietrich von Bern (Old Norse: *Þiðrekr af Bern*).

Most scholars believe that the saga was probably composed in Bergen, Norway, at the court of king Haakon IV, sometime around 1250. Scholars are divided between those that believe that the composer translated a lost Low German original ("translation hypothesis") and those who believe that the sources were mostly oral and conveyed to Norway by merchants of the Hanseatic League, only being joined together in Norway ("compilation hypothesis"). The saga contains a number of otherwise unknown German legends. Controversy exists as to whether to consider the *Þiðreks saga af Bern* a courtly chivalric saga, like Haakon's other translation projects, or a legendary saga given that it contains Germanic heroic legends.

In addition to the Old Norse version, an adaptation into Old Swedish known as the ***Didriks Krönika*** was created in the mid 15th century. It is not a literal translation but an adaptation that would go on to influence further Scandinavian texts about Dietrich and the Nibelungen. The *Þiðreks saga* is a compilation of legends about almost all known heroes from continental Germanic heroic legend into a single text; it also includes other narratives that were closely associated with such legends. Some of the legends have no extant German counterpart. It also contains material from fairy tales, folktales, and Spielmannsdichtung. At the centre of *Þiðreks saga* is a complete life of Dietrich von Bern (Old Norse: *Þiðrekr of Bern*).

It begins by telling of Þiðrekr's grandfather and father, and then tells of Þiðrekr's youth at his father's court, where Hildebrand tutors him and he accomplishes his first heroic deeds. After his father's death, Þiðrekr leads several military campaigns: then he is exiled from his kingdom by his uncle Ermenrik, fleeing to Attila's court. There is an unsuccessful attempt to return to his kingdom, during which Attila's sons and Þiðrekr's brother die. This is followed by Þiðrekr's entanglement in the downfall of the Niflings, after which Þiðrekr successfully returns to Verona and recovers his kingdom. Much later, after the death of both Hildebrand and his wife Herrad, Þiðrekr kills a dragon who had killed King Hernit of Bergara, marrying the widow and becoming king of Bergara. After Attila's death, Þiðrekr becomes king of the Huns as well. The final time he fights an opponent is to avenge the death of Heime (who had become a monk and then sworn loyalty to Þiðrekr once again). After this, he spends all his time hunting. One day, upon seeing a particularly magnificent deer, he jumped out of the bathtub and mounted a gigantic black horse – which is actually the devil in equine form. It rides away with him, and no one knows what happened to him after that, but the Germans believe that he received God and Mary's grace and was saved.

In addition to the life of Þiðrekr, various other heroes' lives are recounted as well in various parts of the story, including Attila, Wayland the Smith (in the section called *Velents þáttr smiðs*), Sigurd, the Nibelungen, and Walter of Aquitaine. The section recounting Þiðrekr's avenging of Hertnit seems to have resulted from a confusion between Þiðrekr and the similarly named Wolfdietrich.

The manuscripts of the *Þiðreks saga* are:

- Royal Library, Stockholm, Perg. fol. nr 4 (Mb), Norway, on parchment, dating c. 1275-1300 and formerly in the possession of Arni Sigurdsson, bishop of Bergen. The manuscript was written by five hands (Mb1-Mb5): the two main writers, Mb2 and Mb3, appear to have used two different source manuscripts, with Mb3 following a version closer to the later Icelandic paper manuscripts A and B. The manuscript has major lacunae, mostly at the beginning and end.

- Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 178 fol. (A), Iceland, on paper, 17th century. Based on a lost parchment manuscript.

- Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 177 fol. (B), Iceland, on paper, dated 1690-1691. Based on a lost parchment manuscript.

- Royal Library, Stockholm, Papp. nr 100 fol. (C), Iceland, on paper, 17th century. This manuscript is a copy of A and Mb, and shares the same lacunae as Mb.

Of these, the manuscripts Mb, A, and B are the most important. The Swedish version (Sv) is preserved in two manuscripts:

- Skokloster Castle Library, E 9013 (formerly Codex Skokloster 115, 116 4°) , Sweden, end of 15th or early 16th century

- Royal Library, Stockholm, Papp. K 45 4°, Sweden, on paper, first half of 16th century
The Swedish version is useful for reconstructing the text where the other versions disagree.

There are at least two redactions of the Old Norse *Þiðreks saga*, with the two main scribes of the oldest manuscript, Mb, each following a different redaction. Scribe Mb3 has followed a manuscript with a redaction similar to that found in the later Icelandic manuscripts A and B, whereas Mb2 has followed a manuscript source representing a different redaction of the material. One of main differences between the redactions is the placement of the section called "Vilkina saga": in Mb2 “Vilkina saga” is placed early in the text, whereas Mb3 has placed it later, in a section largely concerning other marriages of heroes (as a result, "Vilkina saga" appears twice in Mb). Mb3 has inserted two sections, Sigurd's youth and a long description of the various heroes after Thidrek's feast, into the sequence of chapters written by Mb2. It is possible that Mb2 had forgotten this material or else chosen to omit it. The two redactions also contain differences in the names, number (3 vs. 4 brothers), and origins of the Burgundian kings.

There is no doubt that the sources of the *Þiðreks saga* were mostly Middle High German or Middle Low German. It is thus the only extant example of a translation from (Low) German to Old Norse.[20] Given its dating to around 1250, it is roughly contemporary with the parallel German heroic epics, with only the Nibelungenlied predating it. Some scholars have argued that the *Nibelungenlied* itself was a source of the saga, while others have argued that a conjectured earlier Nibelungen epic was a source, and that this hypothesized epic was also the source for the second half of the *Nibelungenlied*. Because of the saga's localization of Attila's court at Soest, it is taken to indicate a local tradition that placed the fall of the Burgundians at that Hanseatic city. The prologue of the saga states that it was composed based on the tales of German men, but its language is somewhat obscure and scholars debate what precisely this means. The prologue also mentions tales told across Scandinavia and Iceland as sources on Sigurd, the Nibelungs, and Wayland the smith. Some material may be original to the compiler, having been put together using various motifs found in other heroic tales.

Most scholars believe that the saga was probably composed in Bergen, Norway, at the court of king Haakon IV, sometime around 1250. Haakon had important Danish-Saxon dynastic connections, as his son Magnus VI was married to Ingeborg, a Danish-Saxon princess, and his chancery also included a number of clerics of German origin, who could have acted as intermediaries for material from the continent. Additionally, Bergen was an import trading center for the North German Hanseatic League, who had merchants that resided there and could have brought German stories to Norway. The composition of a saga based on German materials fits into the larger project of importing courtly literature under Haakon, which also resulted in the adaptation of the chivalric sagas from mostly French sources. However, there is no direct evidence that Haakon commissioned the *Þiðreks saga*. The saga matches the milieu of Haakon's court and adaptations in its frequent use of courtly and chivalric vocabulary. Likewise, the name of Þiðrekr's sister is Isolde, and her son is Tristram (Tristan), which points to courtly influence, and the influence of Arthurian literature is also found in the saga; however, Claudia Bornholdt cautions that such influence could have taken place in either Germany or Norway.

The composer of the *Þiðreks saga* in Old Norse is unknown; scholars debate whether he was an Icelander or a Norwegian. The composer appears to have been educated, meaning he was probably a cleric, as was the only named author of a chivalric saga, Brother Robert.

Scholars are divided between those that believe that the composer of the saga translated a lost Low German original ("translation hypothesis") and those who believe that the sources were mostly oral and conveyed to Norway by merchants of the Hanseatic League, only being joined together in Norway ("compilation hypothesis"). There is little evidence outside of the text itself that would point either way. Most scholars adhering to the "translation hypothesis" have been German, while most adhering to the "compilation hypothesis" have been Norwegian.

The most recent main proponent of the "translation hypothesis" is Theodore Andersson, who regards the text as more German than Norwegian. Andersson argued that the saga was originally composed in Northern Germany around 1200, arguing that the compositional principals and his proposed sources for various episodes indicated familiarity with early courtly literature such as Spielmannsepik and the Kaiserchronik (c. 1150), as well as conjectured predecessor epics for the Nibelungenlied and Dietrich epics.

The main proponent of the saga having been composed in Norway today is Susanne Kramarz-Bein. She has argued that parallels in structure and content to the *Karlamagnús saga* and other chivalric sagas show that the saga must have been composed with its current structure at Haakon's court in Norway. One of the main arguments in favor of the saga's composition in Norway is that no large scale epic or prose work in Low German has survived that would show that such compilations existed in Northern Germany. On the other hand, there are many Norse examples. Arguments for an oral tradition as the source of the saga are mostly based on the prologue's mention of "tales of German men" as sources. As opposed to the traditional "translation theory" on the basis of purely oral sources, Kramarz-Bein has argued for a "composition theory:" that the compiler of the saga relied on various written sources as well as oral sources.

Long-standing controversy exists as to what genre the *Þiðreks saga* belongs to, chivalric saga or legendary saga. On the one hand, it contains legendary stories; on the other, it does not take place vaguely in a legendary past but after the death of Constantine the Great, involves concrete, European geography, and includes King Arthur and Apollonius of Tyre among its characters. The dominant scholarly theory is that the *Þiðreks saga* was written in the same context as the chivalric sagas, namely, as a translation of courtly material from the continent; however, its manuscript transmission in Iceland is in the same contexts as the legendary sagas. Scandinavian scholars have generally been more comfortable discussing the *Þiðreks saga* as a chivalric saga.

Susanne Kramarz-Bein and Heinrich Beck have both argued that the saga shows pro-Scandinavian leanings, exemplified in the way in which it treats the heroes Viðga, Þétleifr Danskr (Middle High German: *Dietleib von Stîre*) and Heimir: Heimir, portrayed as Swabian, is a mostly negative figure, whereas the heroes Viðga and Þétleifr, both portrayed as Danes, are given many positive traits that put them above Thidrek's other heroes. The same scholars have also argued that the localization of the Huns in the North-German Duchy of Saxony could be related to these northern political, potentially pro-Welf leanings.

The *Þiðreks saga* is divided into books, which are also referred to as sagas. Various proposals have been made about the original arrangement of the material. The scribes Mb2 and Mb3 of the oldest manuscript Mb follow different arrangements of the books and chapters. The manuscripts A, B, and the Swedish version likewise all have different arrangements of the sub-sagas. Germanist Thomas Klein argued for a three-part structure of the saga, in which part one shows the youth and bringing together of the heroes, part two focuses on marriage, and part three shows death and old age. This basic structure is also supported by Susanne Kramarz-Bein.

The *Þiðreks saga* also exists in a late medieval Old Swedish adaptation, known as the *Didriks Krönika* (also: *Didrikskrönikan*) or, less frequently, *Didriks saga*. Most scholars agree that the *Didriks Krönika* used the oldest extant manuscript of the *Þiðreks saga* (Mb) as its main source. It is possible that German and Danish sources were used as well, as various names show forms closer to their German or Low German counterparts, and the text shows some Danish linguistic forms. However, there is no consensus as to whether these sources were written or oral. The vocabulary of the text shows many connections to contemporary courtly culture in Germany.

Most scholars agree that the adaptation was likely composed in the mid 15th century, possibly in the 1450s or 1460s. There is a disagreement whether the saga was composed in a Franciscan monastery or at Vadstena Abbey in Sweden. It has been suggested that the saga may have been adapted under the patronage of Swedish King Charles VII. Interest in adapting the *Þiðreks saga* may have been sparked by the saga's portrayal of Swedish control of a large Baltic empire called "Vilcinaland", which included Swedish rule over its rival Denmark.

The *Didriks Krönika* is not a literal translation of the *Þiðreks saga* but an adaptation for a contemporary Swedish public. The adapter has abbreviated the saga greatly. Episodes not connected to the main plot have been removed and others reduced to only what is essential for the main plot. The adapter has also made additions to the text in some places and sought to remove contradictions from his Norwegian source.

The *Þiðreks saga* was an important influence on the chivalric sagas written after it, including *Erex saga*, *Mágus saga jarls*, *Kirialax saga*, *Blómstrvallasaga*, and *Samsons saga fagra*. The author of the *Völsunga saga* appears to have known the *Þiðreks saga* as well. This includes a description of Sigurd's armor that is adopted directly from the *Þiðreks saga*. Old Norse scholar Klaus von See argued that the *Völsunga saga* was written in response to the *Þiðreks saga* as a "re-Scandinavianisation" of the material. The *Þiðreks saga* was also influential on Swedish literature even before the writing of the *Didriks Krönika*, with Dietrich being mentioned in *Herr Ivan lejonriddare* (1303) - one of the translated romances known as the Eufemiavisorna - and the *Eric Chronicle* (c. 1320-1335). Additionally, several late medieval ballads were based on material found in the *Þiðreks saga*.

The Swedish *Didriks Krönika* inspired at least two pictorial depictions. Around 1480, artist Albertus Pictor included the scene of Didrik's fight with Wideke and the latter's flight into the sea was included, along with the battles of several other biblical and legendary heroes, on the roof of Floda church in Södermanland, Sweden. An illumination in a law codex from Uppland from the mid 15th century also shows a scene from the saga: it shows the knight Sistram, identified by text, half-swallowed in the jaws of a dragon.

The Swedish *Didriks Krönika* also influenced other texts produced on Dietrich von Bern and the Nibelungen in Scandinavia. In particular, Jonas Venusinus produced the *Hvenske Krønike* in Latin sometime after 1550, which transports the fall of Burgundians as told in the *Didriks Krönika* to his home island of Ven in the Øresund; the *Hvenske Krønike* was translated into Danish in 1603 by Anders Sørensen Vedel. The *Didriks Krönika* also had considerable influence on Swedish historiography as the saga identified the country of Vilkinaland with Sweden and so its line of kings was added to the Swedish line of kings. In spite of the fact that the early scholar Olaus Petri was critical, these kings were considered to have been historic Swedish kings until fairly recent times. The historicity of the kings of Vilkinaland was further boosted in 1634 when Johannes Bureus discovered the Norwegian parchment that had arrived in Sweden in the 15th century. The earliest edition of the Norwegian *Þiðreks saga*, together with a Latin translation, was published by Swedish antiquitarian Johan Peringskiöld in the early 18th century as the *Vilkina saga* due to Peringskiöld's interest in Gothicism.

Richard Wagner used it as a source for his operatic tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

AFTERMATH

Following his death, his grandson Athalaric succeeded him but, as he was only ten years old at the time, could not rule and so Theodoric's daughter Amalasuntha (l. c. 495-535 CE) took the throne as regent. She was an advocate of Roman sensibilities and culture and entrusted her son to Roman tutors who took advantage of their position to introduce the prince to heavy drinking which is said to have contributed to his early death in 534 CE; between 534-535 CE, Amalasuntha reigned as queen.

She had already opened negotiations with Justinian I in Constantinople to try to help secure her position but received no adequate response. She therefore called upon a trusted male cousin, Theodahad, to rule jointly with her and he came willingly. Amalasuntha then was arrested and exiled to an estate on the island of Martana where, under the orders of Theodahad, she was strangled by her servants in her bath in 535 CE.

Her son-in-law, Witigis (also known as Vitiges), then rose against Theodahad, had him assassinated, and became king in 536 CE. He ruled over Italy until his defeat and imprisonment by Belisarius in 540 CE. Following Belisarius' victory over Witigis, the Goths wished to crown him their new king but he, loyal to the emperor Justinian I, tricked the ring-leaders by pretending to accept and then had them all arrested. Belisarius then claimed the whole of Italy for Justinian I and the eastern Roman Empire.

Although Theodoric could not sustain his policies of religious tolerance nor his diplomatic expertise in dealing with Constantinople, he is still remembered as `the great' for his attempt to unify the populace under his reign into a single people and for, essentially, re-building Italy whether by planting trees, cultivating fields, constructing new buildings, or keeping hostile forces at bay. His vision of a kingdom of unified, though independent, nationalities living harmoniously under one rule was revolutionary for its time.

Even Alexander the Great, who, for the most part, allowed conquered regions to maintain some degree of autonomy as long as they supported his cause, did not encourage the kind of independent national pride the people under Theodoric were allowed. For thirty years Theodoric united the Goths and the Romans under his reign, maintained the peace, and worked for the well-being of his kingdom, raising Italy from ruin to stability and then to prosperity and even luxury.

He was buried with full honors in his mausoleum at Ravenna and, although this was later desecrated following Belisarius' victory over the Goths in 540 CE, it was repaired and still stands in the city in the present day. Theodoric is remembered as `the Great' for his revitalization of Italy and his efforts in ruling over a diverse population without attempting to assimilate either culture into the other.

His legacy continues into the present day as a great king who ruled his people wisely with the vision of a united kingdom of separate but equal populations. His later persecution of Trinitarian Christians is attributed to his emotional response to Justinian's anti-Arian policies in Constantinople rather than a clearly considered policy of discrimination and his memory continues to be honored for the vision he maintained and his efforts to make it a reality.